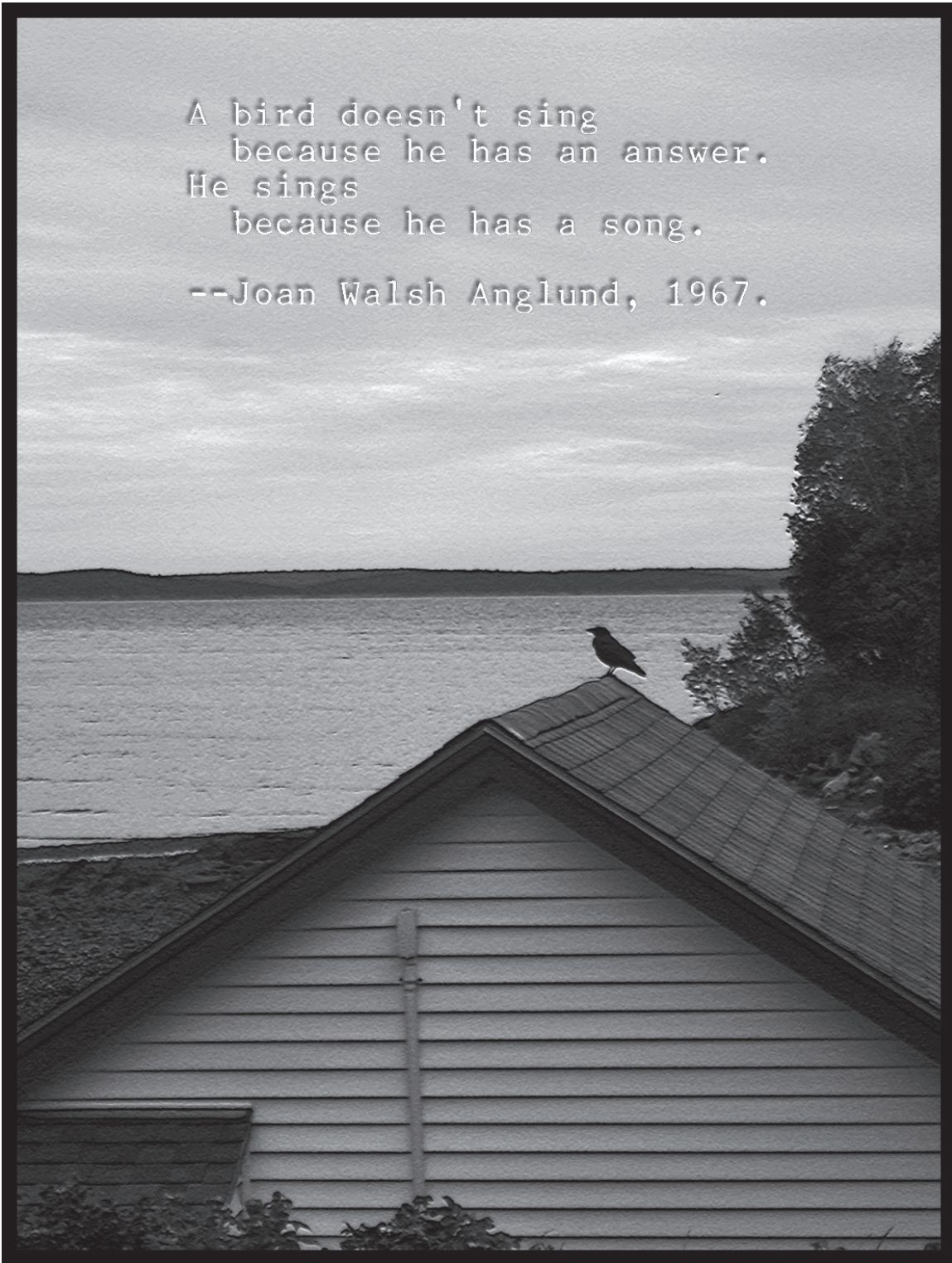


The
Cenacle

Number 94  October 2015

A bird doesn't sing
because he has an answer.
He sings
because he has a song.

--Joan Walsh Anglund, 1967.



October 25, 2015
Home—green couch
Melrose, Massachusetts

Dear President Obama,

This begins my ninth letter to you, seventh since you've been the sitting American President. I've written to you annually since 2008, & also publish each letter in my independent literary journal, *The Cenacle*.

My support for your administration reached a nadir last year, as I finally came to grips with my romantic illusions of your 2008 campaign versus the raw truths of you in office.

The feelings of bitterness & distrust I still feel have directly affected my view of those running to be elected your successor in 2016.

The Republicans seem to be engaging in their quadrennial clown contest, again mistakenly thinking that racy quips on TV news talk shows do any of the work of convincing tens of millions of people to consider seriously casting their votes for any of them. They put the *stu-* in stupid. The *-pid* too.

But neither do the Democrats engage me much. Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders, whoever else, will talk a good game now; one of them will likely even talk right on through to Election Day victory. But once the Inauguration Day speech is given, what then? A special-interest-entrenched Congress, accomplishing less & less each passing session. *What then?*

Strangely, I've still kept my attention, when it drifts to politics, on what you are doing now. You've been taking more action outside of Congress in your second term than you ever considered before.

In particular, & crucially, & honestly this issue alone is making me reconsider your presidency, you've been pushing harder & harder to get action on the growing climate disaster slowly overtaking the world. You've used executive actions to circumvent a paralyzed Congress to cut America's carbon pollution; brokered a similar deal with China; & now look seriously all in with regards to the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris this December.

Regarding this meeting of nearly 200 countries, you recently told *Rolling Stone* that what's needed is a "joint international commitment that is well-defined and can be measured."¹ To assure that everybody is "locked in," in terms of taking this global catastrophe seriously, & committing the time, manpower, & money it will take.

In that interview, you don't indicate that the Paris Climate Summit will be enough, or that anything you are doing by executive order now is sufficient. But you do say the following: "I don't want to get paralyzed by the magnitude of this thing. I'm a big believer that the imagination can solve problems."

The reason why your approach on this appeals to me, Mister President, is because it rings in my ears of the "Yes We Can!" idealism by which you won the presidency. With important differences.

First of all, maybe most importantly, is the "we." The "we" now is the whole human race. "We" caused this crisis, albeit some more than others, & "we" must solve it. Too slowly, too messily, but at it & at it & at it. Your belief is that as the climate disaster strikes more & more of the world, the bogus counter-arguments will dissolve away. It's proving true.

The "we" is all of us, our failed stewardship of the planet, our insane assumption that we *are* its stewards, that we do not simply *belong to this world*, as does all creation within its atmosphere.

The "we" comprises the hundreds of nations & cultures & thousands of languages. Simple truth is that every one of us has to breathe, has to eat, & cannot live for more than a short while outside

1. Jeff Goodell, "Obama Takes on Climate Change," *Rolling Stone*, Issue 1245, 08.October.2015.

of this wonderful, powerful, fragile, human-damaged eco-system.

Second of all, because I think your years in office have matured & tempered you, some. You've been humbled to the corporate-media-political power structure that you seemed to think would bend more than a little to your will, to your sense of right action. You've had to learn how to govern when those around you would rather see millions go jobless, millions live with second-class citizenship, millions suffer poor & die, than agree with you or work with you. A lot of those men & women in Congress are heartless motherfuckers no reason or compromise will move.

I see your work on the climate catastrophe as a natural extension of what you've done with issues such as healthcare, drug policy reform, & gay rights. You at least nudged those in progressive directions.

This issue, though, is something *even more* substantive than those, & it's not hard to foresee your advocacy extending beyond your time in office. I think it will consume a good part of your time hereon. For this, we all should be grateful. We need every powerful voice we can get.

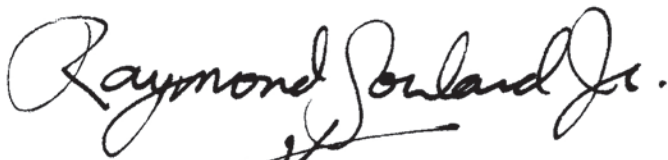
So even as I will eventually take a better look at next year's candidates, I will very likely be measuring them against how you have fared in office since 2008. Your failures, your victories, how you've changed, where you've matured. I'll keep asking myself, more or less, "would he or she fare better or worse on this than Obama?"

But I'll continue watching you as you begin your last full year in office. Will you arrive to 2016 high on the hopes raised at the Paris Climate Summit? Will you push on with it, staking your presidential capital on this most crucial of matters? Will you press the Democratic Party & its chosen candidate to commit to the fight at their 2016 convention?

Will you bring a fully revived & wonderfully matured vision of "Yes We Can!" to the question: "Can we save this beautiful place, our home?"?

Are you done with the bullshit that bogged you down so long? Are you ready again to say "Yes We Can!"?

Peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Raymond Souland Jr." with a stylized flourish underneath.

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SCRIPTOR PRESS



NEW ENGLAND
2015

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- RS Mixes from “Within’s Within: Scenes from the Psychedelic Revolution”; &
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Thank you to the makers of Fitbit for creating a coherent & comprehensive system for achieving better health. For helping KD & I to collaborate with you & each other on finally starting to *get it right*.



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Secret Joy Amongst These Times: The History of Scriptor Press, 1995 to the Present

*“Think for yourself
& question authority.”*
—Dr. Timothy Leary

Chapter Seventeen
continued from
The Cenacle | 81 | June 2012

Read the full History at: http://scriptorpress.com/history_of_scriptor_press.pdf

When I think *The Cenacle*, & what it is to me, so many years doing it, I think: it's *news*. *My* news. The news of my friends, near & far. It is now a quarterly journal, has been since 2008, which structures somewhat what it can & cannot be. It's funny, or maybe not so much, that the more society speeds up, or seems to, the more I prefer to let *The Cenacle* remain what it is. Writing, photography, artwork. The product of several months' labor toward it. The best of those labors. I don't think, really don't think, that society's harder push toward . . . something . . . has solved, or even addressed the eternal puzzles of the human experience. Mortality. Sex. Loneliness. Nature. How to live & why. All the obsessive online blogging & Facebooking does not shred one inch of the distance between any of us. Valuable like an extra blanket on a solitary, shivering soul.

It became a single thing, as maybe it always has been: living on the West Coast, & going annually to the Burning Man Arts Festival. While I started attending in 1999, it was like I'd been aiming West even before that. Burning Man became for me something good, & current, to focus on. I've detailed my relationship with this festival in previous chapters of this history; my concern here, recounting 2010, is how I decided to stop going, & what that was like.

It began with a lack of enthusiasm in December 2009, to begin the prep work, gathering new material for No Borders Bookstore. Simply put: I discovered that I didn't want to. I had never not wanted to before. I didn't know what this meant. Further mixed in to it was discussing with Kassi leaving Portland & where to next? Seemed San Francisco or Boston. The former didn't really interest me as once. Perhaps if I knew people, & jobs were easy to come by. Or if I had arrived with one, like had been true with Portland in 2007.

Boston? I was pretty doubtful. Didn't want to act big just on sentiment. Sure, I missed some times there. Some cafes. Some people. But I'd left 8 years before, moved far, not intending to return.

But maybe. Maybe being again in places still loved down to my roots, people too. It was hard, & I can only say here that the process of how we left looks a lot more coherent to me now than it did then.

At the same time, we were still living in Portland. I was still working my contract at Standard Insurance, still resentful that I could not find full-time work. The economy still too crappy for most

companies to be hiring technical writers for more than limited projects. So I showed up every day, & I collected my check every week. Spent my nights writing at a Taco Bell quite near where we lived, & a hippie-ish joint called Coffee Time a few blocks away. I found my writing hours fit well at these low-key places as much as they had at Bauhaus Coffee up in Seattle. I love these strange environs.

Started in January working on *Scriptor Press Sampler* | #11 | 2009 *Annual*. Continued running SpiritPlants Radio (including starting a new email newsletter for the dozen or so DJs doing shows on a regular basis), & celebrated the 11th anniversary of my own radio show, “Within’s Within: Scenes from the Psychedelic Revolution” by spinning The Who’s *Tommy* rock opera masterpiece.

For the third year running, I wrote up Scriptor Press’s annual goals. They were as follows:

1. Expand the scope & reach of current projects; online; at events; by mail; & in storefronts.
2. *Synchrony* among writings, publications, radio, & web.
3. Support the efforts of others in their work & its dissemination; teach, aid, the *artist* in the *person*, the *person* in the *artist*
4. Support liberation over control, understanding over ignorance, empathy over competition.
5. Better discipline, more learning, better work.
6. Make art, love Kassi, be of the world without losing to it.

These goals comprise what could otherwise be called a mission statement. I can say that, at my best, I pursued these ideas throughout the year. My point here in mentioning them is to say that, even as I felt myself leaving some things behind, I was, more largely, going ever toward where I believed Art was taking me. The good obsession remained full, my challenge being to continuously find the courage to pursue it.

These months of mulling changes & re-location, writing & writing at the usual places, working my pay job, living in Portland, living within a human context of strangers, acquaintances, & loved ones near & far, following closely the artistic productions of the last of these, emerged in texts & images in April as *Cenacle* 72, the 15th anniversary of the journal—

It was a year of moving &, looking at it, either then or now, nothing else seems as important to me. *Cenacle* | 72 | April 2010 documents it live, so to speak, mid-course, & what resonates strongest still comprises that documentation. So best to start there.

This issue features a color cover by Catfishrivers, an artist down in New Jersey & also an excellent DJ on SpiritPlants Radio (his show is called “The River’s Edge”). It’s a funny, echoey collage work.

My “From Soulard’s Notebooks” is a piece devoted to *The Cenacle*’s 15th anniversary. I describe the inspirations for, & development of, the journal from cut-&-paste style to desktop publishing quality. It is a story that fascinates me because I did not anticipate the many steps in this development. My earliest publishing projects, in childhood essentially, were pencil & notebook paper. Simple as could be, private activities, secret pleasures; obsessive though, now & then.

Other than my journal, begun in 1974 when I was 10, & a *Hardy Boys*-style boy detective novel, *John & Philip*, from about the same time, the writing projects I devoted my youth to were publishing projects. The first was *Sports Page*, inspired by Jack Klugman’s sports writer Oscar Madison on the TV show *The Odd Couple*. My father was an impressive athlete as a younger man (boxing, golf, bowling, football, I don’t know what else), & he inspired that same love of competition.

Not much of an athlete, I took my interest in sports in a different direction: writing. Moreover, I didn’t just write about sports I saw on TV. I made up my own football league, the Connecticut Football League, an entity for young players 12-18; four seasons a year it ran, 40-50 games a season, an



elaborate playoff system, a championship.

In this imaginal world, I was a star quarterback for several perennially championship teams. I also ran the league, published its weekly newspaper, *Sports Page*, & broadcast its radio show, *The Sports Page Show*. I did all this from elementary school into high school. It was my earliest obsession. From 1975 to 1978 it was my sole creative project.

In 1977, I got a job as a paperboy when my family moved. Delivered *The Hartford Courant* at dawn every day of the year. This fit well with *Sports Page* & its radio show. In 1978, inspired by reading the news every day, I started *Newspage*, a weekly newspaper in which I copied stories from the newspaper, & also composed an editorial of my own.

Being fairly poor in a suburban high school, having moved to the town when I was 13, so no deep roots, & little knowing of the ways of teenagers, I had a very hard time. Too tall, too gawky, too untaught in how to navigate the hormonal hell of suburban teenage wasteland. And yet what remains sweetest are those hours away from all that stupid ugliness when I sat with my notebooks & wrote. Did my radio show (in my head), skipped classes entirely to ride the bus into Hartford, & read books, & look curiously at street people. I couldn't give a damn less for most of those I daily shared space with at that time. My notebooks of yellowed paper, covered in penciled scratchings, remain utterly dear.

In 1982, I founded Scriptor International, & the monthly *Scriptor Magazine*, which contained my nascent tries at poetry, fiction, plays. Reading books in high school English classes, & falling for a girl who wrote poetry, inspired this project. When *The Cenacle* began in 1995, I was tempted to call it *New Scriptor*. It is, in spirit.

Eventually I lost the discipline to do these projects, tangled in adolescent dramas & working for the high school newspaper. Eventually, the college newspaper & several literary journals.

Here's what's funny: I miss my own projects, not the ones I did with others in those days. While I learned things about publishing—tools, deadlines, distribution, collaboration—and these things helped me in later years—, my heart does not yearn back to them. My heart does yearn back to my secret notebooks, to the worlds I invented, & did so without Internet or cable TV or a big home library—or really much knowledge of the world or its cultures at all. I had the four channels on black-&-white TV: Sunday football, evening news, nightly comedies & dramas; & the local newspaper I delivered seven mornings a week. Library books & the radio.

Nobody I knew knew much of the world either, or told me much. My classes taught me rudimentary levels of knowledge. I was not indoctrinated into any religion—save the American uber-religion of consumer materialism, built loosely on Puritan loathing of sexual pleasure & tolerance, as well as a wordless fury at any who do not wash deep in the Christian ideas of sin & redemption, heathen & redeemed, Heaven & Hell.

These projects were innocent & simple, but they were *mine*. I created them, I devoted to them. I longed one day to be a famous writer & marry the blonde Mouseketeer Kelly on TV; I was utterly vulnerable to people who mocked my clothes, my hair, my nervously sweaty, underfed, underwashed body. I still mostly looked to others for my view of myself. Their conclusion: loathing-tinged indifference.

And yet I created worlds where I mattered, the best of me mattered. And, honestly, where everyone else mattered too.

I've taken this detour into my past, deeper than this *History* has gone before, as prelude to engaging fully *Cenacle* 72. For it is an issue chronicling my willing return to my past—to the East Coast, to Boston—which is something I had not done before. I'd moved from Connecticut to Boston in 1992, from Boston to Seattle & Portland in 2002 &, aside from my one year's unwilling return back to Connecticut, my path had never been back.

But San Francisco, to me, meant Burning Man, & I'd left, retired from, graduated from, *something'd* from Burning Man. Boston lured me anew, as it had back in the early '90s. In remarking upon *The Cenacle's* 15th anniversary in "From Souland's Notebooks," I sum it thusly:

These remarks on 15 years of presswork would not be complete without some future speculation. Our pending move (& my return after 8 years out West) to Boston this summer bursts in my mind with wonder. Since 2002, Scriptor Press has moved far & wide in many directions, even as I eventually tired of the West, & yearned to return to Boston. My roots are in New England, especially its literary traditions. The names Emily Dickinson, Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, & others etch deeply in my mind & heart. I return to their home, still, as much to my own, past & to come.

Even the thank you section of the issue's table of contents is a goodbye to valued people in Portland, & happy wave toward those in Boston.

The issue's main contents begin unusually with my "Notes from the Northwest." Issues rarely do this, as I prefer to lead off with a new or returning contributor. But it's indicative of the nature of this issue. "Nothing lasts . . . but nothing is lost," *NNW's* epigraph, could be the whole issue's title.

"Notes from Northwest" succeeded "Notes from New England," but the concept was the same: short essays and/or fragments culled from my notebooks, at least somewhat regionally-concerned. The time & attention given to this feature varies issue to issue. Sometimes there's lots of writing to choose from—& sometimes not. I let it happen. This issue's instance was very much of a piece with much of the rest of the issue: leaving, remembering, anticipating.

It begins with the comment on the many Saturday nights Kassi & I spent at Coffee Time Coffeehouse, on NW 21st Avenue. Lined with bars, & drunks, & me not drunk but otherwise elevated walking through it all:

So, tonight, I was walking along 21st & thinking how the bastards & angels of human consciousness are openly displayed everywhere. How most young adults herd into boozy joints to stare at each other while getting drunker & drunker, a state best described as peaking early & then lumbering along for hours on end until the body collapses exhausted.

Before Portland, similar nights on Capitol Hill in Seattle; since, Harvard Square in Cambridge. Each just a little different. My Saturday nights have long not been spent in bars but instead writing, high & long hours at it. Those drunken days were fun but there were too many of them & they went on for too many years. Glad to have moved on.

Much of *NNW* is devoted to leaving Burning Man behind, returning to Boston:

After 11 years of attendance, I will not be coming to Burning Man this year. By my choice, not a financial decision. It's more that the feeling of excitement & novelty I once felt is over. What remains is obligation. And that's not enough. Not enough to make the effort worth it this time.

These are, of course, more personal feelings based on personal experience, so valid only to that extent. But there is also a pointed critique of Burning Man's own operating principles, worth quoting in part:

- 1. No Spectators—or even few? Or not fucking thousands? This would involve capping attendance, funding more small art projects, encouraging everyone to get involved, through a high profile campaign. Many don't know how not to be spectators.*
- 2. Leave No Trace—It's a sound, good, & necessary principle but not every newbie shows up with the know-how or the experienced camp-mates.*
- 3. Radical Self Expression—but within the bounds of a long, long list of rules. Worsening this is that many have rarely expressed anything radically in their lives. It takes learning, emulation, encouragement.*

It took me a long time to lose the festival's shine from my eyes. Some remains, always will, should, & glad it does.

Since 2010, writing now a couple of years later, I've done some research on what next, what could be next, a good new host for our No Borders Free Bookstore, but no luck yet. I've worked on the next half-dozen new Burning Man Books, could have them done easily in a few months. I don't know if I knew it would be so hard to find a successor. But finding Burning Man itself back in 1998, online, was a fluke in itself. So maybe what's next will have to come by a similar combination of effort & good luck.

My *Labyrinthine*, Part Three, features important new locales to the book: the Noah Hotel & the little town on the Mexican border that is overrun by the Lights. Also, strange new characters in Genny's doll Tweety Bird, & the return of the enigmatic Cosmic Early.

The Noah Hotel is a playground of weirdness. Its staff is a segregated group of former homeless, addicts, whores, now workers likely quasi-slaves; its uncertain height & depth; its rooms & suites used by rich patrons for all manner of sexual & other escapades; & the strange room where many of the book's main characters meet for the first time.

Nicknamed the "No-Tell" for its unofficial privacy policy, its namesake may even now be cleaning its rooms & vacuuming its hallways, vaguely remembering more glorious days. Its relation to the nearby Luna T's Cafe is uncertain, though young Dylan does discover a doorway between the two.

The Noah Hotel interests me because hotels interest me. The transience of their customers, arriving to bare rooms & being swept away themselves on departure. Their oddly-lit hallways & ornamental rugs. Their staffs usually helpful & aloof. Money paid for heated, lit, enclosed space for a set time. Views of the parking lot, highway. Bad, overpriced restaurant food. Unloved beds & tables & chairs. I haven't done much all with the No-Tell yet. Its fruits hang many, & low.

Imagine a city like Hartford to be where the No-Tell is located. A city full of poor but with a thin layer of rich on top. Earlier stories were set in Hartford. Luna T's inspired by a restaurant in Hartford. It fits.

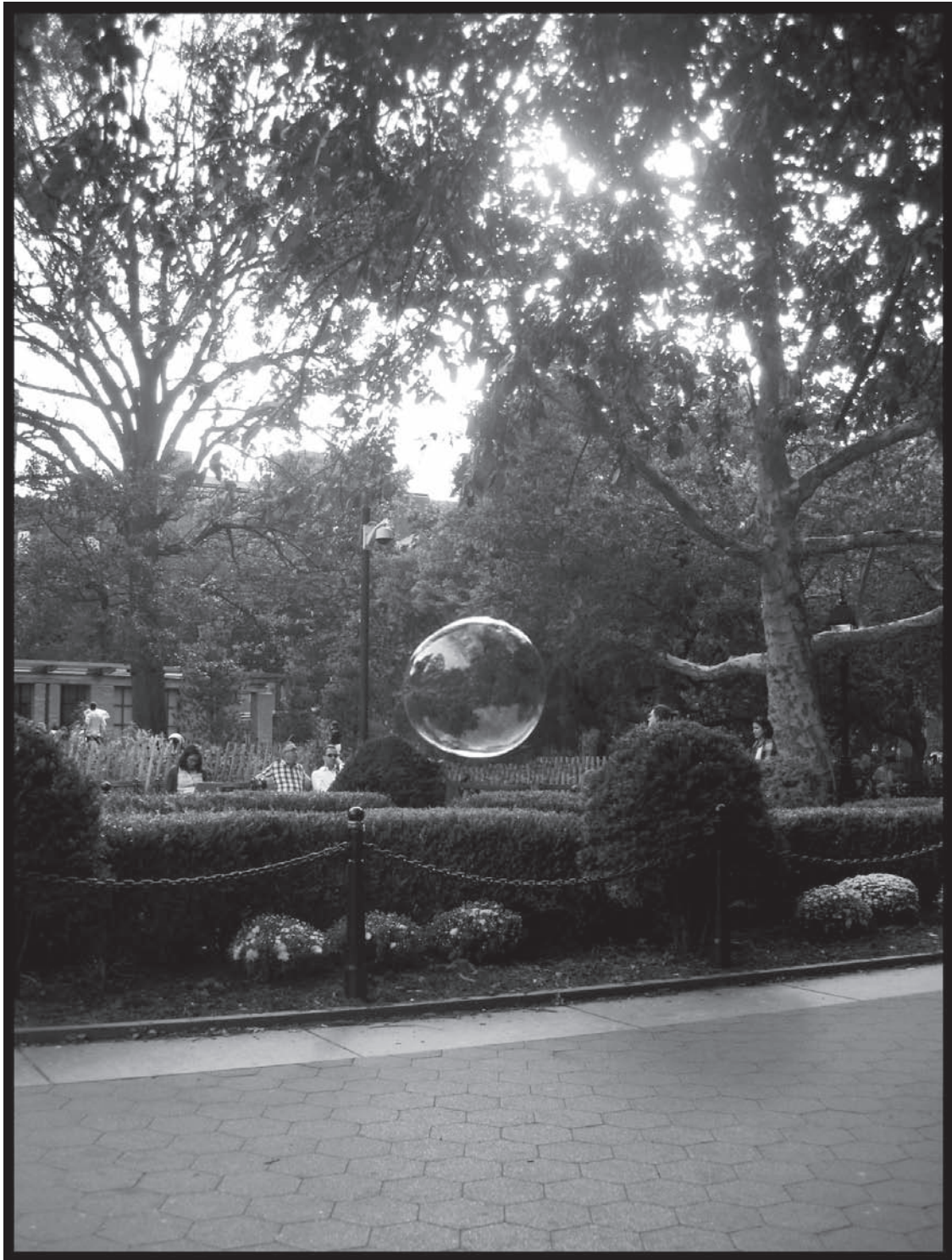
There is no name yet for the little New Mexico border town where the Lights regularly appear overhead. Inspired in part by the Marfa Lights in Texas, these apparitions are a part of a long-running theme in *Labyrinthine*: the ships are overhead. They have, in fact, always been overhead. Their purpose, if one, or many, remains unknown, or multiple. They interact in different ways with different characters in the story.

I believe it is more than likely that the ships *are* overhead, & always have been. This world is too strange, & nothing explains it fully, or well. An alien aspect, or more than one through time, would perhaps explain more. Fictional speculations on the matter allow me thinking room to play with its possibilities, while committing to none. Coming at it from many angles is fun, & I don't feel obliged to shade toward advocacy. At least yet.

The way we learn of the Lights in *Labyrinthine* has to do with Bowie, the story's resident spy who, during one of his periods of recovery from his traumatic trade, meets, among his various street companions, a man named Paul. Paul had met a girl, Rosie, from the little town, while both traveled on a Greyhound bus.

He said they lived in New Mexico, a little town in the desert, where she was from & where he moved to when they got married. They'd met on a Greyhound bus, & traveled til they had no money or options left but go home, her home, marry & set up shop.

Their life there seems fine until the night she disappears in a dust storm. Though he eventually couples up with her cousin Paula, by the time of his meeting Bowie he is homeless & living in a city on the West Coast. Haunted by his & Paula's attempts to travel back to find out what had happened to Rosie that night.



Bowie recalls Paul's account while he himself is on board a Greyhound bus to that town, some year or years later. Drawn by the Lights, by Paula's theories of Alternative History, by the tries at time travel? It's not clear what his motives at this point.

Genny's childhood doll is called Tweety Bird, after the cartoon character. My guess is that Tweety was named by a very young Genny. And lost along the way. Found again, somewhere in the Midwest, broken in a ditch as she goes to visit her brother Shawn, & finds instead a friendly black & white collie.

Genny has given up her heart's dream, following Preacher, supporting his mission, being near him. Finding nobody but the collie, a passing friend, she departs the empty farmhouse, & finds Tweety Bird in a ditch, & a ride to town. A hardware store, for some glue & rubber bands. Another ride to a motel.

Not sure she is dreaming, dead, or just lost, Genny checks in with Tweety. The night gets weird:

Tonight someone suffers. Genny watches all of it coming out of her motel TV, she's nude holding Tweety Bird who's nude too, all the colors are terrifying, someone suffers tonight, she watches & touches her skin to make sure she's still there, someone tonight suffers, he'd been with her, he'd touched her shoulder & she'd screamed into her mattress, a long long time, it felt relieving to finally let it all go, crazily, wildly, let it go, & when she'd looked up, calm a moment, she'd put on the TV for comfort & company, they'd both undressed, for a laugh & the colors hadn't been there at first, no, at first had been a TV show she thinks she watched once, it became colors slowly, not even noticeable at first, around the edges of the screen & then she couldn't turn it off, & then she couldn't move, he'd touched her, he'd been there, in that room far from everything, been there & touched her shoulder, "tonight someone suffers" Who'd said that? Him? Anyone? The TV?

The whole country setting is based upon my about-annual trips to visit Kassi's family in eastern Colorado.

I wanted to take Genny far from the life she knew—traveling in a group of women following a male leader, a tight-knit clan, one that had fallen apart over time—& bring her to her source. She finds Tweety Bird, who becomes again her totem & comfort, & her past is more revealed.

Genny is funny, & smart, & sensual. She's loyal to Preacher, which he values more than she understands. Their story will long continue.

The strange writer Cosmic Early makes his first appearance in *Labyrinthine*. Early first appeared in *Things Change (Six Thresholds)*. Rebecca Americus had discovered a ragged copy of one of his books, while hanging around an all-night bookstore. He was briefly quoted in *Why?*—but this time comes in person.

Early is an old man, writes books of philosophy. A sample of his strange, shaggy writing follows:

Know that world bides, world wants, world seeds everywhere, world is home. Change is possible, happening, flush it with hope, flush through, not good nor bad but what causes growth, ease, freedom. Where hope prospers, men & beasts & trees all live fruitfully. Where hope abides, wicked is better understood as hunger unfed, dream mocked, faith caged, desire etched in coin, fear a constant shadow between faces.

We learn that Early is an oneironaut, one who travels in Dreamland, & something of a “rival to Benny Big Dreams,” though sick & mortal. He seems involved with Bowie, Christa, Rosie (& what happened to Rosie), & of course knows Rebecca. Lives at the No-Tell, & it is here in his room that we meet a new girl to this story, the young Jasmine, or Jazz. Jazz is looking for her sister Ashleigh, & believes Early can help her. Early's motives are less clear at this point:

Cosmic Early partly understood her, the part she let him understand. He was brilliant too, but old, past when age helped, when the body's complaints slowed the mind, obscured its sharpness. Not long ago, he would have known her in a lazy glance.

Their narrative will grow much more complex.

What is notable about these pages is that they were written in early 2007, in the months before we moved from Seattle to Portland, & now appeared in *The Cenacle* in 2010 in the months before we moved from Portland to Boston. Eventually the lag between writing & publishing *Labyrinthine* pages would close up much, but, at this point, the gap bore this odd aspect to it.

Other prose in the issue included a letter by Jim Burke III, an essay by Ralph Emerson, & a reprinted essay by Joan Didion.

Burke's letter is written in response to mine (partly featured in the issue's *Notes from the Northwest*), in which I discuss my reasons for moving back East, parting Burning Man & the West Coast after a decade of frequently traveling there, then living in Seattle & Portland for a combined six years.

What happened eventually is that I got to know the Pacific Northwest, cared for but did not love it. And Burning Man got bigger & bigger, more cops, more rules, more spectators. Deeper roots began speaking to me. Maybe I just feel I'm done here.

I also write in the letter about my "Art's center" shifting, "& therefore I follow." Burke's letter delves similarly into his own roots, growing up north of Boston, gravitating toward nature & music, away from his Catholic upbringing. He writes at length about the "meditation tree of life," saying:

It has many limbs and the goal is to keep pursuin' the truth. Some of the limbs are longer than others and require you to be in different places for varied periods of time.

Further on he writes about the artistic life:

The artist's life is certainly not meant for everybody In a perfect world, we could pursue our artistic endeavors without political constraint, and the manifest chains that inevitably bind us to the physical plane. My escape continues to be a little weed playin', and smokin' a guitar—or something like that.

Jim talked often of intuition & trusted the idea of it, developed his own as best he could, if that's possible, which I think it is. He was a strong, funny, deeply empathetic man. I don't just think of him with love but with deep admiration. Not perfect, as he'd immediately say about himself, but deeply, emotionally intelligent. I've known no artist his superior & doubt I ever will.

[A sort of oddness to writing now about Jim back in 2010, knowing his loss from 12/1/2011 on. Had I written this chapter, as I should have, in 2011, I'd be saying some different things, certainly minus the sadness.]

Ralph Emerson contributed his essay "J is for Jumping Jack," another in his series on phonesthemes. The essay's opening lines sums its intent:

The letter J has three quite unrelated uses. In vocabulary words, J is a signal of 'up-and-down motion', as in jiggle and jump. This reflects the letter's physical prototype, the Jaw, which moves up and down as we talk and eat: jabbering, joshing, and "jawing" away. Since this 'up and-down' connotation holds true in many far-flung languages, it seems to be the letter's natural job, or at least the natural job of the "juh" sound that we happen to give J in modern English.

It is the combination of lingual vivacity & long-earned scholarly authority that makes Emerson's essays shine, compel their reading. Like William Safire's old "On Language" essays in the *New York Times*, Emerson's pieces embody the classical definition of Art: to *teach* & to *entertain*.

Cenacle 72 reprints Joan Didion's 1967 *Saturday Evening Post* essay, "Slouching Toward Bethlehem," also reprinted in the Burning Man Books 2009 series.

Didion's style, called the New Journalism, embeds her first person in the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood of San Francisco in early 1967, just as its hippies, freaks, musicians, runaways, dealers, & others were getting the attention of the national media. Not for its long-term benefit.

She roams half-intentionally from individual to individual, group to group, story to story, crisis to crisis. She loves to tell stories, immerse herself in the little details & relationships governing people's worlds—& she does this quite well.

Yet, when push comes to shove, & I mean *push* & *shove*, she backs off:

Norris and I are standing around the Panhandle and Norris is telling me how it is all set up for a friend to take me to Big Sur. I say what I really want to do is spend a few days with Norris and his wife and the rest of the people in their house. Norris says it would be a lot easier if I'd take some acid. I say I'm unstable. Norris says all right, anyway, grass, and he squeezes my hand.

She's looking closely, she's feeling deeply. And yet the chasm: she does not understand that this *isn't* a social revolution, or a supra-social revolution. It is a *revolution of consciousness*. Had she trusted those whose lives she tangled into, who *trusted her*, & dropped some Owsley, she would have understood, seen fully in plain light what she only got shadows of: LSD *changed the world* & Haight-Ashbury was one of its launching pads. A new world was aborning around her, as much as with the prior conceptions of democracy, monotheism, the printing press, the atomic bomb. *LSD changed the world*.

Didion saw long hairs, freaks, hippies, whatever, & so on. What she did not let herself see was that *she walked among revolutionaries*. Peaceful, sharing, flawed, fragile revolutionaries. This essay is a deeply felt portrait, & yet it could have been so much more.

Ric Amante contributes five of his fine poems to the issue. One of particular note is "Above the Tree Line." Just 10 lines: constructed as prose, two sentences. The first:

*Right now I'm lying shirtless
on a hot slab of pink granite
in a sun-blasted, speechless trance—
part lizard, part corpse.*

Half-naked, reptile, dead. A moment of non-human living in a human life. Amante experiences this "other" state often, & yet is able to describe it in melodic human words. The rest:

*I can't say why it's so
or where it comes from,
yet I know the well-being of others
keeps this mountain in business;
if blessings are missing,
this incarnation means nothing.*

These lines are the pay-off, the metaphysical punch line. For they are not the thoughts of a corpse, or a lizard, but a live, thinking man, one who perceives good will on behalf of nature, & believes that good will of one physical thing toward another is what gives life its great worth. I'm not sure it's necessary to

agree with the poet's vision to find empathy with his conclusions.

Continuing this line of thinking, into Judih Haggai's haiku. In particular:

*a polar bear walked onto my canvas
with frozen tundra words
we understood*

Sometimes polar bears happen. They arrive &, if lucky, understanding occurs.

A step along:

*absolute zen
before enlightenment, bake cookies
after, bake cookies*

Is this funny? Is this serious? Yes, both, Haggai does this, over & over. Her words, her music, weigh well in the ear, & in the mind, *because* there are polar bears, *because* there are cookies to bake.

Joe Ciccone's "Dance Hall Orphans," a sad, surreal poem, as his often are. Its middle stanza:

*There were days of reflection, and others days,
more ragged and with frayed ends—
when he took photographs of wallflower women,
whose pale hands held bouquets of their own flowers;
days when the fires rose around them and she said "stand and deliver,"
while he thought about the Savior.*

Frayed, ragged days. Wallflower women with pale hands holding bouquets. Fires & a more particular woman's imperative. All this, "[w]hile he thought about the Savior." Ciccone's poems don't *arrive to* the reader's hands as much as they *invite* the reader along. Dreamy land of old cars, railroad tracks, overcast days, winter. When they work, which is quite often, they travel the reader around & return him with some strange & good souvenir in hand.

In addition to his front cover, we published a gallery of Catfishrivers' wildly strange sketches, filled with distorted torsos, odd animals, & undenoted shapes. A talented man, he, by pen, by guitar, by camera.

This issue featured the first half of my *Many Musics, Sixth Series*, 30 poems in all. I'm now re-reading them five years later & they are clearly poems of my last days living out West. Some looking back sentimentally ("Bauhaus"):

*So I wrote here, for years, hard &
deep. Sometimes awful. Sometimes not.
A thank you. Remembrance. Til next.*

Some looking on with curiosity ("East-West"):

*Now I look over all the heres & decide to move on
by returning. An old here beckons new & I think
maybe here is just shorthand for everywhere & nowhere.*

The first six a series of poems about some cut flowers Kassi was given. I watched them decay over several days, loving them, yet deeply upset I could not help them:

*When you finally joined the other,
I was clumsy & your petals fell
scattered to the floor. I delivered
the remain of your remain
to the flower box, a lean, a toss, a departure.
Your bloom went elsewhere,
like the light after dusk goes.*

The issue also featured the second Manifest Project run of pictures, this time a sweet variety by Jim Burke III, Ric Amante, Victor Vanek, Kassi, & me. This project iterates every few years & I find everyone's involvement delightful. A disposable camera, a piece of chalk, & the instruction: "manifest."

The "Last Yawp" this issue is a photographic collage of all the empty storefronts in downtown Portland, circa 2010, & the Thoreau epigraph: "City life is millions of people being lonesome together." I was only one of countless struggling to get & keep work.

The back cover another of Kassi's lovely blooms photos, & a line of my poetry. The last of 22 issues published while we lived out West (11 in Seattle, 11 in Portland), from 2004 to 2010. *The Cenacle* departed with thank yous, affections, & new hopes.

The issue successfully debuted at the 4/17/2010 Jellicle Literary Guild meeting, the 9th & final JG meeting in Portland. Two years of this West Coast version had successfully revived the group, & proven that I could take the original idea & work it with a whole different group of people. But, by this meeting, only our dear friend Victor Vanek made it. We three did a good job raising the spirit, & threw in a new wrinkle—Judih Haggai, live via video from Israel, reading her great poems.

Even as I was anticipating the event's move to its third state, I was glad I'd revived it. It assured four nights a year devoted with friends to their art, & a great way to debut new issues of *The Cenacle* & other Scriptor Press publications. This was especially important in the years since we stopped attending the Burning Man fest.

As our time out West was nearing its conclusion, we took a trip into the past, & one toward the future. In March, we took the Amtrak train up to Seattle, last of quite a few occasional visits taken up there, ostensibly to see my doctor, but mostly to visit old haunts. Punky old dive Bauhaus, Seattle Center (with its famous Space Needle), great cheap burgers at Dick's Drive-In, Starbucks on Capitol Hill, Elliott Bay Books, Amante's Pizza, Dilettante Chocolates. Weaving our love for this city anew back into our hearts' skeins.

Then, in late April, a trip out to Boston. Kassi had been there only once previously, in 2007. That time with me was fun, skein-renewing; this time was to get some ideas on where in it to live.

Flew first into Connecticut, to see Jim Burke III & other old friends. The area hadn't changed much over the years, but it was dandy to see Jim & hear his beautiful singing & guitar playing live—only second visit in 8 years. But now it would be much more often.

Then up to Boston. Public Garden. Kendall Square-MIT. Christian Science Park & its gorgeous reflecting pool. Eventually—happiness!—Harvard Square & my beloved Au Bon Pain courtyard. I wrote poems there, like old, & everywhere else too. Kassi liked it, & I was convinced that if I had to struggle with joblessness, as was coming in Portland, with slim hopes in that lovely city's bad economy, I might as well do it back on my old home grounds, with more loved ones nearby.

Back to Portland & my last few weeks before leaving in late May. Working my job at Standard Insurance, long a disappointment, a paycheck, no more. I'd been there a year, daily, helping to create documentation for their disaster recovery program, but it meant nothing to anyone. *I meant nothing.* I'd had many jobs like this before, took them personally, no matter what anyone else did or didn't think. Felt I deserved better. Felt *anyone* who put skills & care to a job deserves better.

Only way to deal with it is to move on, as I did, as I had no choice but to do. Put it on my resumé, & carry on.

Thinking it out larger: I'd arrived in Portland in June 2002 & left the same month 8 years later. Arrived jobless & heart-rent. Left jobless & married. Arrived a writer, editor, publisher. Left a better one. Arrived a nascent technical writer & editor. Left, though jobless, better, more confident, & with a much stronger resumé to bring back to Boston.

So the failures somehow, collectively, added up to something. I was, however hurt by life, stronger overall. If there's a virtue to writing this chapter so tardy to intent (now September 2015), it's that I can see those years for what good they led to. It was not in any way clear at the time they would.

I spent my last 10 days before leaving on May 24 packing & readying, & applying for unemployment & deferring student loans, & writing lastly at my old joints. One molds one's life around one's job, dwelling, loved ones. Downtown Portland isn't very big, & in 2010 was not at all prosperous, but I worked my writing & press projects many downtown lunchtime hours at the Hilton Hotel lounge, McDonald's, Carl Jr.'s Burgers, & nighttimes at Taco Bell, CoffeeTime, Starbucks near where we lived. Good memories despite.

A week before I got on the Greyhound bus to the East Coast, I finished one last press project in Portland, *Scriptor Press Sampler* |11| *2009 Sampler*. The *Sampler*, as mentioned in previous chapters, is a compendium of writings & graphic artwork culled from the issues of the previous year's *Cenacle*.



It's a pleasurable project to work on in the spring of every year. Like assembling a additional *Cenacle* for the year. My method is to include a representation of each contributor, figure out how to build a distinct little 100-page chapbook from about 500 pages of *Cenacle*.

The poetry is easier to work with. Simply selecting the best of the best. This issue featured the poetry of Ric Amante, Joe Ciccone, Judih Haggai, & myself.

With the prose, especially the longer pieces, I have to do some artful re-shaping. Christopher Gose's *World's Window* ayahuasca journal, for example, published in all four issues of the 2009 *Cenacles*, required that I select passages that stood independently as a group. A challenge, & fun to do.

On the other hand, the letter by Jim Burke III, fictions by G.C. Dillon & Susan Jones, & language essay by Ralph H. Emerson, were all short enough pieces to include wholly.

And the graphic artwork by AbandonView, Catfishrivers, Victor Vanek &, of course, Kassi, gave the book strange & lovely colorings.

My own pieces included *Many Musics* poems, *Labyrinthine* fiction, & *Notes from the Northwest* prose. Excerpting from my own writings I think of separately, since I am making my own choices.

Samplers are created to be distributed independently of the other press projects, a kind of elaborate calling card, or invitation. I've just not yet pushed this idea to its full potential.

Then in late May I got on a Greyhound bus to Boston for several weeks of apartment hunting & job-hunting. Primarily the former, as we had to have a place to arrive to. I had not been on a cross-country bus-trip since coming out to Seattle (via Omaha, Nebraska to visit with Kassi) in 2004. I decided to take one more, to see how it felt after the passage of years & life.

The trip itself hadn't changed at all. Not one but numerous buses needed to cross the U.S. continental range. Much of middle America is flat & seemingly lifeless. Sleep is hard to get for any length of time; a couple of hours most times. Buses stop every couple of hours for drivers' breaks. Buses break down. Buses are late & connections are missed.

It felt like I was leaving behind a period of my life that had often involved long-distance trips. Had begun in 1999 when I drove with Mio Cohen to our first Burning Man festival. Travels back & forth for that event, to move out West, to move back East, out West again. Romance come & gone, & a better one come again. Last trip to Burning Man in 2009.

So my experience of about a dozen years of this was concluding, & thus one more bus trip. The actual move would be by moving truck in early July. Packed up my notebooks, MacBook Pro Eurydice, iPod Polly, cell phone, pens, paper, clothes, & one more time went to the hoary Portland Greyhound station, where my life & heart & hopes had crossed many times in those dozen years. This time with Kassi's sweet kiss goodbye. Kept a "Road Diary" of the trip, which was published in *Cenacle* 73-74 in September (so will hold off on trip details till that issue discussed).

Arrived three days later & began the slow process of re-acclimating to living in Boston. I'd left, I'd thought for good, in June 2002, bound for the West to formalize my commitment to it. Took a few tries, but when Kassi & I landed in Portland in 2007, me newly hired to work for Symantec Corp., the deal seemed done. It would have been, if the economy hadn't crashed in 2008, & I was not laid off, again & again, & again, unable to find sure & stable work in devastated Portland.

It's now five years past those times, but a part of me still wonders about the unchosen path. At the time, I was burnt out of a lot of things. Of Burning Man, job woes, lack of many friends, dreary snowless winters, & this feeling that I would never stick solid to the ground there.

Returning to Boston unnerved me too, but it had much I missed & many good friends, & family too. I guess what I needed was more security, especially since it wasn't just my sorry ass on the line this time. Kassi had stuck by me solidly & I had to protect her. Had to hold up my end of our shared effort. Whether the West let me down, or the bad economy trumped all, or I missed my origins, or the disappointment about Burning Man, or the need for a new adventure, or likely all of these was, were, the reason or reasons, it felt right.

Boston I *knew*, even as being away from it for years I found changes here & there. I knew how to live there, even as I had to start from scratch with apartment-hunting, like I had in 1992, & a new job, like I'd had to often before.

My friend Ric Amante & his partner Melissa Wattenberg put me up for my working visit at their house just north of Boston. I kept writing during this time, thinking I'd get *Cenacle* 73 done before moving. Kept running SpiritPlants Radio's weekend schedule of new shows, including my 3-hour (temporarily pre-recorded) show. Kept working on a new RaiBook, first in 3 years, revising Chris Gose's *World's Window* ayahuasca journal down to about a 75-page chapbook.

My multiple visits to my beloved Au Bon Pain Café courtyard in Harvard Square in Cambridge compensated for discovering numerous other old favorite writing joints were gone.

It was emotionally weird because I was resuming living, or arranging for resuming living, in a place which I hadn't planned to return to, & now *wished* to return to. Old feelings of defeat & departure warred with what I had to do now: put all of my self, best & otherwise, into making this work.

So I had highs when I was writing; when I was looking for an apartment Kassi would like that we could afford with savings & no jobs yet; when I was grokking anew with a city I'd mostly always loved.

And I had lows when the stress of these tasks, piled on top of several years of job stresses, & a lingering sadness at leaving the West, got the better of me.

Didn't help when my beloved MacBook Pro Eurydice had a hard drive failure. I sent her in to a good repair place in California, but it took me weeks to recover only most of her files.

It was an unrecipred mix of Yesterdayland with what was potential to come. I scored us an apartment in Arlington, next to my beloved Cambridge, in early June, & soon thereafter spent a day writing in my old haunts in Malden, where I'd lived up till 2002. A job interview took me on a long bus trip far north of Boston; only thing that came of it was a foot injury (accidentally left a pair of rolled-up socks in one of my shoes!).

Finished up in Boston after several weeks there. Spent some last fine hours with Ric, with many more promised soon, & took the Greyhound bus down to Hartford, Connecticut, my actual origins. More recipe-less mixtures of time.

Happy to crash on my friend Jim Burke III's couch, visit with his daughters. Happy as well to see Phish in concert for the first time in a decade. Same outdoor venue I'd last seen them in 2000. The music & the laser show & the good vibes still the same. I was so delighted to be a part of their scene again.

Reaching further back, I found my way to my writing haunts in my old college town of New Britain. Capitol Lunch, Peoples Donutshop. Quirky working class atmospheres where me huddled with pen & notebook in a corner wasn't much unusual. While some played the ponies at the off-track betting place nearby, & gathered there afterwards to commiserate, I locked into my iPod music, & wrote away.

Finally, furthest back in my time travels, was getting a ride with Jim to the U-Haul storage facility where most of my possessions had sat in storage for 8 years.

I had to get boxes of books, notebooks, LPs, stereo equipment, etc., etc., ready to be packed into a moving truck. Spent an hours-long day sorting through & organizing treasures & trash of my past into plastic bins. I was really happy to have my notebooks & records soon back in hand.

Then it was time to come back one more time to Portland. Kassi had spent these weeks, having left her job too, packing up our apartment. I arrived back in late June, & we had about a week to finish off. Our good friend Victor Vanek, a trucker by profession, had agreed to take a week's vacation to drive our moving truck cross-country, with us on board too for the adventure. So twice now in a month's time I was riding across the continent, this time to stay.

The best kind of friends are usually the kind who can take almost any situation & find some laughing & adventure in it. Where the first trip I'd been on my own, keeping best company in my notebooks & music, this time I had two of my dearest people to share the miles with. We saw pretty Multnomah Falls just outside of Portland; dusty, strange Rawlins, Wyoming for Chinese food; a quick stay with Kassi's kin on their cattle farm in eastern Colorado; camping with fireflies in Grand Island, Nebraska; a playground in Illinois; the trouble of a flat tire on a big truck in Ohio. Miles & hours passed. I had five poems percolating in my head as we approached New England.

Passing through Connecticut, stopped at my now-ready U-Haul storage unit to add my stores there to the truck. Then zoomed on into Boston & to Arlington. Unloaded, sat down exhausted amidst many boxes. Saw Victor off after a day or so of entertaining him in thanks.

The remain of the summer I mixed unpacking, getting used to being back in Boston, & a fairly crowded apartment, enjoying new & known places to write, with getting SpiritPlants Radio back on air (mid-July), & working on the renumbered & dated *Cenacle* 73-74 (this lasted into September).

Sorted LPs & notebooks now in possession. Started jobhunting. Revised the Scriptor Press logo to read "Scriptor Press New England" (which had been my original idea for the name back in '95). New poems written at Au Bon Pain courtyard. Brought new *Samplers* to Ric Amante & Melissa Watterberg's Out Loud Open Mic poetry event.

Happy for being back, & feeling new inspirations. But worried for finite savings with a need to pay rent & buy groceries, & us both unemployed. Worried enough to keep moving, trying, asking, but this can turn eventually into despair & paralysis.

Mostly I kept busy sorting all my old & recent things into order. This had to be done & kept me mostly away from the worst of my fears. And Kassi got a job at a non-profit organization, Oxfam International, in August. I also had a local "rail-trail" to often & safely ride my hoary old beloved bike.

All through this I kept working on *Cenacle* 73-74. I'd decided it would be a "transitional" summer double-issue. Thus not having to be finished by June as originally planned, & structured to feature such pieces as my "Road Diary" from May.

I wanted to do all of this right, felt that this move has been 2010's great summer work, as Burning Man had been for 11 years previous. Publishing the first Boston-based issue of *The Cenacle* since #46 in June 2001 was crucial to do *really well*.

Cenacle 73-74 is more an arrival issue than a departure one, though there is still a bit of the

latter. And, for the most part, its contributors are from the East Coast, which maybe reflects how my meaningful West Coast contacts had waxed & waned by 2010. This, & how I could not find good work in Portland, led me to look East, where I had more dear people & a feeling that I could find work again, as I had before. And all this mixed with departing Burning Man.

We are, nearly entirely, what we feel, even if our feelings, however we understand them, however we let them influence our actions, prognosticate very little accurately. Most people come & go, & sometimes again, & this is a hard lesson to learn because our feelings are an accumulation to now, & no more.

Most of the people I had waiting for me then are, five years later, little direct part of my current life. Others have mixed in & out too.

But then was its passing now, & I did with what I had, what I knew, what I guessed, & *what I felt*.

The front cover of *Cenacle* 73-74 is from Revere Beach in Revere, Mass., a day I spent there with my friend Ric. Nice beach near city, planes passing over to & from Logan Airport. We'd gone there many times in the '90s; I don't think since the day that picture took in 2010.

The back cover I took with my cell phone while passing that summer by Greyhound through New York City, en route to Boston.

That four-day trip's "Travel Diary" comprises the issue's "Notes from the Northwest" (last time this column with that name). The trip's purpose: "to re-establish living ties with Boston, home, job, friends & family, & bring my beloved Kassi & all of our mundane & magical possessions there."

As I said above, I think of this trip as a kind of goodbye to a dozen of years of coming out West, by plane sometimes, but mostly by Greyhound bus. To Burning Man, to chase love, to find somewhere out there the welcoming home to stay of the psychedelic dream as it dwelled in about 1966. I now don't think it's any more one place than another necessarily. I think it manifests more or less so, in how men & women treat one another & the world around them. It's an *ideal*, not a locatable patch of ground.

So as I traveled, I wanted to know what I was, what I thought about & felt in 2010. The answer was easy: I thought about writing, I wrote; I read a brilliant psychedelic speculative novel called *City of Saints & Sinners* by Jeff Vandermeer, & thought about other such novels (Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, Ishiguro's *Unconsoled*) & films (Lynch's *Inland Empire* & Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*), & music (Beatles' *White Album*), & TV shows (*Lost*, *Fringe*, *The Prisoner*) of the same kind. I kept editing Chris Gose's *World's Window*. I took pictures. I read my friend Ric Amante's very fine self-published book of poetry, *Digging In*. I wrote poetry. Accumulated it all in this "Road Diary" for *The Cenacle*.

Mountains gave way to long hours & miles of flatlands. Bus after bus. Passed through small towns & big cities. Passed through Omaha, Nebraska where I'd first met Kassi in person in December 2002.

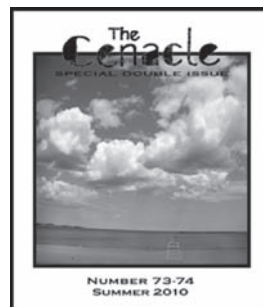
From a bus station in Boise, Idaho, I wrote what remain true lines for me about what I am: "Writing is my meditation, filling a page for me is contemplating the blank wall or chanting a mantra for another. I don't know why. Maybe there is no why. But gratefulness."

So I arrived, as has been detailed, & eventually down to Connecticut, & it was shortly before I left that I wrote "From Soulard's Notebooks" from the Peoples Donutshop in New Britain.

What's curious about this deeply ruminative piece is that it does not mention at all my pending cross-country move! I'd just rented an apartment up in Boston! Was moving there from the other coast in less than two weeks!

No, I was looking widely around beyond my own drama & set of circumstances, & trying to understand what I saw:

the beauty & the waste men have wrought on this world cannot be considered as equal. When



we damage or destroy aspects of the world, or each other, this matters, this changes all a little bit. Everything matters. A corollary I carry with me is: nothing goes away, nothing returns.

I look around, remember my long ago days living around there, &, wishing to connect newly, decide to write this piece for *The Cenacle*—“from a whim jump into this piece for *The Cenacle* & see if it goes. Remember, intensely, the *me* of here.” I eventually conclude:

change changes all . . . Where I pull out of my worst free falls of pessimism is to recall this thought to myself, couple it again & again to a stubborn persistence, & choose to believe, consciously call it a faith

This piece plainly reflects my earlier contention that we are, nearly entirely, what we feel. Hope & despair each have their compelling intellectual & rhetorical arguments, but it is an individual’s *felt emotional truth* that will tend him or her toward one or the other. I choose hope in this piece.

My *Many Musics* poems are the third of the pieces directly dealing with our move East. Of the 30 poems in this group, poems such as “Harvard Square in Spring” mull leaving & arrival, concerned with me trying to get *it* again, as though this finally possible:

*A wish to remember, finely and fully,
& then ask, what else? What tonight? What the morrow?
Living things move restless, quick and slow,
cross the planet, dead ones at their ease.*

Then there’s a poem called “Memory & Prelude,” which occurred because I found an old high school essay of mine as I was unpacking in our new apartment. It was about L. Frank Baum’s *Wizard of Oz* books, a series I cherished then & now, but then they were a lifeline out of my nightmare adolescence. I had few friends, no Internet to find anyone elsewhere. I had books & music.

The essay received an A+ by an overweight worn-out English teacher who saw some special value in me, until he caught me helping a bully (who liked me for some reason) cheat on a quiz.

The poem details the moment, its drama, & how “all I wanted was to fuck a cheerleader.” Its heart lies in how discovering this old essay in my moving boxes, some 30 years after I wrote it, woke me wildly one morning to write it all out. It concludes:

*And what was all this for? Maybe all these
years later I simply look back & wonder
how little connection any of us made then,
& how this not-much truth is so often true.
That hour, helping, cheating, hoping, breaking,
it passed, passed long, long ago. Nobody
left from it. Just an old sheaf of typed pages
I found yesterday, what was called onion
skin back then. A grade scrawled over it,
the dead bones of a gone pride.*

Sometimes it’s what we unknowing carry along with us along the years that collapses time & space, here & there, then & now. This moment is ever all.

Continuing with the poetry in the issue, Ric Amante has six poems featured. “Mockingbird” is of especial note, & the following lines:

*Mockingbird,
teach us again to just shut down and sit
within the wild graces of your mimicry.
Much has been said already—
how do we begin to move deeper,
divested of half-solutions?*

Nature, for Amante, bears truths men could know too, & learn by, but more often than not, don't. And they suffer by this.

Melissa Wattenberg's *nom de plume* in *The Cenacle* is Zannemarie Lloyd Taylor. She is a very gifted poet, & several of her poems are in this issue. These lines from "Prayers and Laetrile" are especially good:

*There is prayer in every healing. Thought
Directs molecules the way wind
Carries dandelion seeds. If
Prayer were laser,
It would pinpoint wayward
Metastases. But prayer
Is scattershot. Hit-or-miss. Guided
By hope, not cross-hair precision.*

Its diction unfancy. Rhythm casual, like talking. Yet deeply striking thoughts, landing, staying.

Among Judih Haggai's several poems, it's "How I wake up" that strikes as deeply as those poems above. Loud neighbors & peacocks & cars & cats & dogs & phones wake the narrator, yet she says: "wake up and smell and grow."

Moving into the issue's other prose, the lead piece is "Wilhem Reich: Life & Death of a Social Pioneer" by Alex Smith. Smith is a Canadian environmental activist who hosts an excellent weekly radio show online called "Radio Ecoshock" [<http://www.ecoshock.info>] We got in touch because I wanted to broadcast his show about once a month on SpiritPlants Radio. And I found out we shared an admiration for the European scientist & philosopher Wilhelm Reich. Smith sent me a fine essay he'd written about Reich. I edited it for publication in *The Cenacle*. Reich has many challenging & compelling ideas. Smith sums up some of them here:

Reich believed that adults used sexual repression to create authority, and to make children ready for domination. He argued that this process was carried on through the educational system until they fear their inner selves but trust the worst political rats. They can't revolt or question authority because of their awful inner fears which may begin with early sexuality. This same pattern of domination has been used down through the ages.

When Reich moved to the U.S., & spoke out against nuclear testing, & warned of its dangers to human health, he was hounded by the U.S. government, had his papers & books burned, & eventually died in jail. Smith's essay climaxes:

What if we accepted Reich's myth that there is an energy, that it can be accumulated, that it is hurt by pollution and radiation, that it resides inside the armored core of each of us? This life energy is everywhere. It appears on craggy, frozen cliffs and in the deepest sea bottom. Life pops up in the scientist's sealed laboratory dish, arriving from the air. Life is as likely to colonize machines as vice versa. It cracks open the heaviest stone monuments and eats away the strongest steel.

Smith is a great writer & just as good a proponent of environmental justice.

Ralph H. Emerson contributes another of his great language essays, “Q is for Queer.” His introduction nicely summarizes his essay’s theme & tone:

Although we think of Q as irremediably twisty, when it was invented almost four thousand years ago, it wasn't a twisty letter at all. It's always had its O-like loop, but its tail went straight down until the Romans redrew it on a slant. The equivalent Hebrew letter qoph is written פ, and the even older Phoenician qoph looked like a female sign ♀ without its crossbar. Like all the early letters, it was a picture; and the Phoenician kids who sat learning their letters in ancient gardens knew exactly what qoph meant and what its picture showed: the eye of a needle.

Every issue of *The Cenacle* includes an essay on psychedelics, either a new piece or a reprint. This issue features the reprint “Psychedelics and Alchemy” by Jim DeKorne. It is a complex, compelling argument about how psychedelics can play a role in the individual’s “Great Work of Transformation.” DeKorne writes:

Psychedelics have the capacity to both unify and fragment consciousness. Most people who have experimented with these substances with any frequency know that the highest gnosis that psychedelics offer is that “we are all one.” Our consciousness has been unified: we know the whole. This is the state of awareness variously called “satori,” “samadhi,” “nirvana,” etc. in Eastern religions. The gurus tell us that anything less than this state of unified awareness is illusion.

What further makes this piece a standout is DeKorne’s willingness to tell of his own struggles to discover & walk his own path, & to admit how much he does not know, & how each of us must create & walk his or her own way.

G.C. Dillon’s “From Antactica With Love” is another of his clever short fictions. What he accomplishes is a richly detailed & elongated joke.

Finally, this issue’s portion of my book *Labyrinthine*. Trying to sum 40 pages of fractured multi-narratives would be impossible to do well, but there is a passage that I think reaches deep inside this portion of the book to fold back & reveal some of its essence.

The way is called dis-illusion, that any heart finer than its bowels, (remember the old song: shit is beautiful!), that any golden vessel of faith not some long, subtle hustle for sweet young meat, (the honeyed spot before too many other bees have come there), or a begged home beyond the soil (bury me in the wordless glare, burn me & my every page, puff my ashes to the woods & stars, better ever that than deathless kingdoms of men, leave me out of man-dreamed or conjured eternities, little faith in my heart for this world that any where men are not slightly bonded by mortality would be better, any god or heaven contrived by men will roar often with primal bloodlust garbed in manners & tradition & commandments, burn me in the glare & if specks of my being feed a tree or a star or a hungry trout, so much more the better) (Not to die another ragged man buried in undone vows)

There was no resumed Jellicle Guild to debut this issue at, so it was handed to a few & mailed to others, & of course posted online at *The ElectroLounge*. When done in late September, the issue’s prep had traveled back & forth across the country twice over about five months. It was a satisfying relief when it was done, distributed, & archived.

On the other hand, *Cenacle* | 75 | October 2010 was made in less than a month, in time for its debut at the first East Coast Jellicle Literary Guild meeting in nearly 9 years. I was still jobless, which is quite likely why the issue could be made so quickly. There is also less of my writing in it than most issues. Still, it’s a good number for many reasons, & I was damned happy to get it made.

Jobless, & still adjusting to life back in Boston, both familiar & new. Our one-bedroom apartment was mostly set up. Crowded but livable. As said above, I continued to run SpiritPlants Radio with about three new weekends of shows a month, including my (again live) show on Saturday mornings. Kassi was off to her new job every day. A kind of stability had set in.

I worked at writing, editing, & typing the new issue at various local coffee shops, including of course Au Bon Pain Café courtyard in Cambridge. Used the Minuteman Bike Trail often to get about. Saturdays we took our journeys to movies & other imaginal spaces. I felt I'd come home & was happy for it. Getting a new issue done & a Jellicle Guild meeting to debut it at helped me to keep steady at job-hunting, parallel to these activities. Its silences, its frustrations, vague promises—feeling low & yet having to fake high in interviews & screenings—went on & on for months & months & months on end.

Cenacle 75 begins with my fourth annual letter to President Barack Obama, written just a few days before the mid-term U.S. Congressional elections. Democrats were being forecast to lose big, & they did (losing majority control in the House, nearly losing the Senate too, & suffering massive defeats on the state level).

Knowing this likely outcome, my letter to Obama pleads with him to get back some of the higher ground he'd been ceding in the first two years of his administration:



Fight your way back. This country must see again the better angels of your—& its own—nature. Be willing to lose a few battles in the name of winning the War. The faith lost in the possibility of the government acting rightly & decently is a greater threat than any single piece of legislation. I urge you, in sum, to govern more fearlessly, & to lead again with the hope you once shined upon millions of faces.

It took me a long time to let go of the image of Barack Obama as a progressive visionary, & loosely align with Barack Obama the centrist administrator of the American corporate technocracy. To understand the limitations of what he was able, & willing to do. Healthcare reform, war drawdown (but not ending), gay rights among these.

On other issues, like gun control & drug policy reform, his activism was less powerful. Regarding climate change, his gears only started revving up later in his current second term.

And, to be candid, he's not Mitt Romney or John McCain, the two opponents he defeated in presidential elections. A somewhat weak centrist trumps extreme right-wing tools every time.

The main contents of the issue kick off with Judih Haggai's interview of the California poet Martina Newberry. Newberry eloquently describes what inspires her to write:

I write about relationships—the cruel, the complicated, the simple, the joyful, the sexy, the fearful, the painful, the intense I write about music, dancing, reading, aging, cooking, sex, and/or the lack of it. I write about how, in these simple things, fear can destroy the mind and the feelings of anyone I write about God—how “we pray to a God we do not love for those we do love.” I write about churches, priests, confessions, weddings and funerals. I write to and about a God we look for and seldom find

And then advises how a poet can write better:

By reading and writing and writing and writing. By growing personally, by constantly learning and talking with people and seeing new things. I think you're a better poet when you allow yourself to be jolted out of your comfort zone.

A group of her poems follow upon the interview. She's a good, dark, but often funny poet. I'm partial to these lines ("Stone Steps"):

*what is there left to talk about
after the politics of war,
the ethical poses of religions,
the egregiously bad behavior
of the new movie legends?
I'm quite satisfied thinking
of your ankles touching mine
beneath our sheets.*

Another new contributor is Horse Lampner, actually the *nom de plume* of contributor Ralph Emerson's father, also named Ralph. "Hook, Line, & Sinker" is a sweetly humorous tale, with a sort of O. Henry twist ending.

Poetry by Ric Amante features as usual in the issue. In "People vs. Buddha," he writes:

*For you one evening it all fell away.
Under your tree you stopped pursuing,
even as you ran down the hillside.*

*And we, too, seldom and brief,
watch it all without clamor unfold.
Sail out, free and open,
leaving our name at the shoreline.*

*Yet our ship of blood will snag again
on tides of memory and desire,
and not today, not yet, not until
we chose to ditch this mortal craft
will we join you in the voyage.*

His ease with a language he does not fully trust is pretty amazing.

More of Zannemarie Lloyd Taylor's poetry appears in the issue. In my "Notes on Contributors," I call her poem "Cat Walk": "something of miracle." Describing the death of a beloved pet cat, she writes:

*During burial it rains, the ground is hard,
and we shift from foot to foot. Nothing will fix this.
Words or why, beside the point. We plant pussy willows
On her grave, because they will grow and tangle. We
Hold hands, hold each other in some place behind
Heart and mind. Here is the place for her return, the
Promise of revival, where all dead friends may
Come to live again. Nothing is forever, except this tangle.*

Just wonderful work.

This issue features the re-renamed *Notes from New England*, called that again after an eight-year period. It's a brief piece, only two pages. I think the following bet captures its emotive feel:

*there is not far from our home a miles-long mixed-use path called the Minuteman Bikeway. One of
my favorite things about Burning Man was being able to ride for miles & miles without the danger*

of cars. When I discovered this bike trail nearby—it runs through several towns near Boston—I was thrilled. Amazed & thrilled. Where once was a railroad, a few years ago it had been converted to its current use.

I was ready to do more with this ongoing feature; just needed some time.

A batch of great new haiku by Judih Haggai. Here's an sample:

*talk about evolution
it's now and it's always
only language changes*

Her 'ku are brilliant little gems that just delight me to read & publish.

I've been writing the new fiction *Labyrinthine* since 2006, & I'd very much like to explain it simply, explain what it's about, but I seem to be able only to say: *it's about everything*. But for this passage of this History about the *Labyrinthine* pages in *Cenacle* 75, I will address the Beast.

The Beast is, in sum, my reaction to anthropocentric religions & philosophies & perspectives about what the world is, & what men's position is in it. Whether owner, user, caretaker, guardian, or survivor of the world. Most human societies do not live well in this world, & most people suffer & are unhappy. This strikes me as *cause & effect*. We treat our world poorly, & so we treat each other poorly.

An alternative view would say that everything is sacred & should be treated thusly. But even partway to this, that everything is valuable, or everything is needed, or everything is dependent on everything else—any of these would work better.

Many men believe in the divinity of a figure called Jesus Christ. In this myth, a man-god propagates a child through a human woman, & the child grows up to preach a message of peace & love among men. His message poses a threat to the power structure, which murders him. Yet his followers keep & perpetuate his message through the centuries. Twist it to become one of in-born guilt & sin, which can only be relieved for vague promise of after-death reward by lifelong obeisance to an institutionally-dictated set of body-loathing & natural world belittling rules.

What of the trees & animals & soil & sky? The bugs & the birds, the fruits & nuts & vegetables? What of the mountains & oceans & deserts? Why a "God" shaped like men who fathers a "savior" shaped like men too?

The Beast emerges from the heat & heart of the world. Its form is all the forms of the world. It is no more sympathetic to men than any other kind:

More a beast than a man haunts the clearing shaped like a temple in the White Woods. Imagine a being shaped like every creature & creation the world! To have fired through bug & collie & raked ravines through canyons & given the Universe the gift of growth, decay, moving light, want & fecundity, tendered one with a day's life & another with a century's & another with many, some to fly & some rooted, the blind feeders crushed beneath the boots of the troubadours of men—

The Beast pursues Maya for obscure reasons. She is Code, Key, and/or Conduit:

What first caught the Beast's reck, crushed bloom's scent, stretched blouse, maybe a weightless laugh frosting the night air? Yes, perhaps? The Beast bodies & multi-bodies an hour, a day, less & less for many years but there was a scent, was a laugh & they left markings where little possible, a crevice in hide unmarkable, at least in a long while, but the crevice had no further history until this same scent, sweating, fear-pocked, crossed through the temple-shaped clearing.

The Beast recurs in *Labyrinthine's* pages more & more over time till I become convinced that

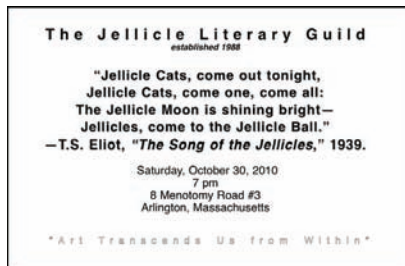
we humans are part of the Beast as much as all else. *Because* we do not live lives devoted to strengthening & valuing the bond that exists among all men, & between men & the world, we suffer. Our societies are mal-organized institutions of sanctioned cruelty, & our cultures at best mourn this situation, & at worst celebrate it.

I find life & meaning in everything, but don't know what to do about this. So I write on & on, in *Labyrinthine* & my other works.

In late October, two exciting literary events occurred. The first was that I was the featured writer at Ric Amante's & Melissa Watterberg's Out Loud Open Mic event. I had half an hour to read from my work. So I read poetry, an excerpt from *Labyrinthine*, & my newest annual letter to President Obama.

What makes this a relevant mention in this press history is that in addition to Melissa & Ric, who I'd already known, I would find two major new contributors to *The Cenacle* (one immediately; the other not for awhile). A nice event overall, held at an old mansion in a town north of Boston, friendly group of people.

A few days later (10/30/2010), Melissa & Ric joined Kassi & me, as well as my friends Ralph Emerson & Jim Burke III, up from Connecticut, at the first East Coast Jellicle Literary Guild meeting



since 2001. Halloween-themed for fun, it carried on with music, poetry, fiction, & lots of laughter, till 3 a.m. *Cenacle* 75 debuted, & was well-received. I even began the meeting recounting how many times each of them had been to the JG. Ranging from me (114) & Jim (96) down to Melissa (her first).

Come November, back to my routine. Job hunting. Started into writing for *Cenacle* | 76 | December 2010. SpiritPlants Radio celebrated 7 years on air online, with me in charge for 2 years now.

My challenge, jobless, was to build up each day's work & worth. Kassi would be off to work by bus about 7:30 every morning, & gone till at least 5. As anyone who's been jobless knows, the challenge is to build a substitute routine, & not let the grinding, persistent stress & worry drown one's good intentions.

Breakfast with Kassi, *Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. Football blogs to read about my beloved Cowboys (terrible season in 2010). Job hunting emails back & forth. On a good day, I would be on my bike by mid-morning to the local library, or one of the various coffee joints or donut shops.

Like other times of struggle, writing & editing kept me going, gave me that inner sense of worth & familiarity I needed. I kept *necessitating* myself to do this good work. Some days I despaired, & hours were wasted on nothing.

The worst of it was in early November when a job I thought I'd scored with a job agency I'd worked with back when fell through, after weeks of seeming assured, just waiting to close it. Then a day soon after when I was panicked that my unemployment benefits were near gone. I made a call to Oregon; turned out I qualified, just barely, for five more months. I was falling down, jackpot-happy.

So I kept along into December, essentially focused on *Cenacle* 76 in what I was reading & writing. Third finished issue in four months. It'd been 14 years since that had happened, & *The Cenacle* was a longer entity now, more complex & time-consuming.

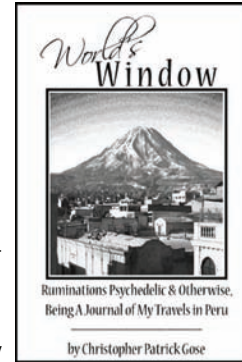
Still, arrived to 12/18/2010 JG meeting with *Cenacle* 76 in hand to give out. *Cenacle* 76 plus the first new RaiBook in 3 years: *World's Window: Ruminations Psychedelic & Otherwise, Being a Journal of My Travels in Peru*, by Christopher Patrick Gose.

Gose's volume first. We'd serialized *World's Window* already in *The Cenacle* in 2009, & featured excerpts in *Sampler* 11. I thought it would make a really good volume in the RaiBooks series, but the full text was too long for the chapbook format. So editing it on down from over 100 pages to about 80 was one of the tasks I pursued that fall into early winter. I teased it down by excising long passages

about family struggles, & other material not directly related to the travels. It was a challenging task but the kind I very much enjoy. I determined to make him a good book.

In describing the book in online promotions I did for it at the time, I wrote the following:

In 2009, the New Mexico native & psychedelics enthusiast traveled with his partner down to the jungles of Peru, in search of the truths & healing that working with ayahuasca shamans might bring. Along the way he experimented with the coca leaf & other indigenous psychoactive plants. Gose writes of the ecstasies & pitfalls of travel, & recounts his personal struggles—toward clarity of life purpose & lightening of heart's burden—with the singular intelligence & plainspoken yearning of a contemporary pilgrim. His narrative is compelling & informative, & moves at a lively pace. Gose's quest is a universal one for men & women—the answer to the question: “How to live & why?”

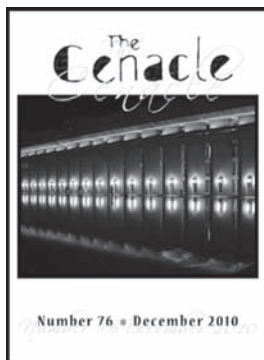


What drew me to this narrative even more than its fascinating content was its brilliant good writing, paragraph after paragraph of lucid sheen. Here is one example of countless:

So perhaps it is fitting that the Inca worshipped the Sun, the source of the light which has been—across the ages—the central “natural symbol” and metaphor of the mystic’s heart. In my own life, the Lumen Naturae has comforted a heart alienated by a distant mother and a world alienated from itself; a man has to stand for and within something. Rain is falling outside, and the Christ statue above on the hill where the Sacsayhuamán ruins are situated is alight, a white and gleaming beacon with arms outstretched above the valley. It’s quite a pleasant statue, less austere and encumbered by theism than many images of Christ—more natural like a bird in flight. It was here in the mornings that the priests of the Inca would raise their arms, palms stretched upwards, to receive the rays of the sun. Enough for today—tomorrow is a mystery with arms outstretched to receive it.

Kassi & I rendered a pretty little green covered paperback, pleasurably laced with the many pictures Gose took. Seventh RaiBook, first of prose, & a good new entry.

Cenacle 76 is less than 100 pages, short by usual standards of length. This is because I have only three pieces in it. But I like them as pieces, & the rest of the contributions as well. Re-reading it now, I feel it’s as good an issue as the rest.



The front cover is Kassi’s nighttime shot of the Christian Science complex’s reflecting pool in Boston, more mysterious for a single shadowy human figure embedded in it. The back cover is a close-up of an old painting-cracked door & its door knob, part of a series of pictures she shot at an abandoned greenhouse we found in Cambridge. She finds urban decay potent & provocative photographic material.

I wrote the “From Soulard’s Notebooks” piece in one go at one of my favorite coffeehouses, Diesel Café in Somerville, Mass. Long long space, covered in old signs, filled with strange music, often crowded to few open seats. Just let loose one early December day:

Are these times more hopeless than others, or seeming so because they are occurring now? I tend to think the latter, having lived long enough to recall distinctly different years when equally many people felt a new age coming as did those who identified driving apocalypse. I’ve come to believe that humans have been struggling with the same matters of society, morality, mystery, & mortality for a

long, long time, & coming up with too many imperfect answers. The last piece in the puzzle never fits, or is missing.

I write these kinds of thoughts over & over, in varying forms & words, putting on the old questions to test their potency, auditioning answers for better or worse effect. There's weird pleasure in it. Maybe a sense of my own continuing identity confirmed by the questions. I keep asking & the answers I keep leaning into.

Tom Sheehan is a wise & funny old gent I met at the Out Loud Open Mic. His poetry is widely published, & often brilliant, & he gifted me with some for this issue. Of the bunch, "John Maciag," which he also reads aloud often in his rich Boston accent, is especially fine:

*John Maciag was all bone
knees, elbows and jaw
hated his rifle
 proficient at killing
wanted home so badly it burned his soul*

*We leaned up that mountain
near Yangu, frightened
War's hurricane tore our ranks
 trees of us lifted by roots
I came running down three days later*

*Like cordwood the bodies were stacked
between two stakes
all Korean, but that jaw
 of John Maciag I saw
a log of birch amongst the scrub*

*I stopped, the sergeant said move on
I said maybe never
I'm going to sit and think about John Maciag's
 forever, whose fuel he is
what the flames of him will light
Perhaps he'll burn the glory
 of God or man*

His wartime experiences Tom has often rendered into poetry & fiction. It's one of the very few worths of war.

Another contribution by Zannemarie Lloyd Taylor are excerpts from her book in progress, *Gluten-Free Guerrilla Cooking Book*. A fanciful memoir of sorts, this passage catches its tone & flavor:

And the overarching sky—completely untroubled by memory—produces the next set of multiple skies, complex, majestic, apocalyptic, without regard for what came before. The fundamentalists and the mystics talk about the last days coming; and I have to wonder, have we missed them? If I sway and fall to a wild and unfamiliar gravitational pull, if we admire double and triple, quadruple rainbows across a fractioned sky, are we in a time of something we don't know, can't fathom? We find our way haltingly, divorced from the earth and sky we knew before. Could it be so different? I look down at my feet and keep moving.

Of Judih Haggai's many fine poems in this issue, this one delights me most:

*a slow trek
a bird and i
this november morn*

Another short fiction by Horse Lampner, "Horse Holiday," less funny & more sad, about a man appreciating an old neglected Army horse.

The poem by Martina Newberry is an anti-war screed called "Bad Manners," that concludes:

*Listen please.
It is not indigestion keeping you awake nights
or the thoughts of a heart you broke
in some fit of bad manners or microwaved lust. No,
this insomnia you suffer is made of oil and blood blending.
This insomnia is the total absence of Love as humans have known it.
This is unabashed Knowing climbing into bed with you,
putting its hands around your throat and squeezing
until your heart bursts open and its pieces
scatter over the world like petals.*

A beautiful darkling yawp.

Dave King is an English writer I'd met online. He let me excerpt a chapter from his work-in-progress, *A Short Introduction to Hallucinogens*, called "The Psychedelic Experience: Is It Real?" His powerful argument sums in part here:

The opportunity to examine the world in a wholly new way, assuming that this examination is not accompanied by any physiological or metabolic detriment, is in my opinion such an important opportunity because it provides a unique holiday from one's sober mindset to fully compare and analyze what one previously held as truths. It provides a temporary release from a whole host of preconceptions, predispositions, and presuppositions. In our sober lives we see very much what we wish to see in the world around us. The psychedelic experience offers a chance to see more of what we notice every day, but haven't really seen since childhood. That which, like a cosmic optical illusion, can be seen in a different way.

The second of my three pieces comprises my "Notes from New England" & is called "J.D. Salinger: In Memoriam." Like editing Gose's manuscript, this piece had taken me weeks to write that fall, as I read through Salinger's four books, taken many notes, & tried to come to grips with the death of this literary hero of mine in January 2010.

Divided into "Biographical Notes," "Preliminary Notes," & "Epistolary Notes," I gathered my thoughts in a semi-non-linear way to contain them coherently. In the second section I write:

What it seems is happening is that JDS is moving deeper into a mystical view of the world, from story to story, and away from writing for the sake of fame and such. His characters, pilgrims, are both him and not him, they are his fictional partners in a quest for spiritual truth, and it seems like he eventually leaves the world of commercial publishing because it does not interest him anymore (he said as much in rare interviews). His stories remain interesting to the reader because his is polished, lucid prose, often funny. His ear for dialogue is diamond sharp, his eye for studying the right small detail, and just enough of them, is pretty much perfect. One is exhausted by his works because when

a story is over, if one has read attentively, something has happened. A prayer has been spoken, and completed. It was intense, it was funny, it was familiar, & yet odd. Now finished, one must go, leave the temple of words, and move along.

These lines to help establish a clear opinion of Salinger's intent, & its effect.

Then, more specifically, his books' effect on me:

Salinger taught me that the singular matter of importance in writing is voice. Voice means many things: narrative, rhythm, music, character, flow, and so on. But voice sums them. Does the piece sounds like itself, like it gestated from its own purposes, or does it sound kinda like this one and sorta like that one? Voice is not unlike, or absolutely like, the idea of grace. One arrives to the state of grace not sure how it happened, unable to cough up a formula for others, or even for one's future self should a sense of falling from it occur. Moreover, one knows it, when one is in one's own voice. In recent years, I've come to believe that this idea of voice is not exclusively about Art, either. I've seen football players, statesmen, even persons in conversation, manifest as a kind of voice. It's a complex idea, at least for me, to write of something so obvious yet be hesitant to feel confident that I've gotten it down clearly.

And, finally, a conjured sense of how his posthumously published works (if this ever occurs; five years later & only rumors) might affect me:

I'd like to think that, whatever else you were in life, the part of you that made it to the page, & was published in books, was some of your best. For it is on the written page that I know you best—not in photos, or anecdotal accounts of your friends or family, or even in biographies. I'd like to think that the marble & mud of your life is distilled to the four books you published. That in their pages you asked your best questions, offered up your best answers, your hopes, your fears, & so on.

I think this because it seems to be reasonably true & because I do the same thing. Much of my best arrives on the page (& some of my worst, & a lot else too). And if there were no more stories to come from you, post-mortem, if you simply never wrote any, or burned them all at some point, I'd like to think that this is OK. I don't know this for sure but it's a hope. I admit a greater hope is a big cache of stories due in book form on a near timeline.

We were also lucky enough to feature two pieces of art by Abandonview in this essay. Writing this piece meant a lot to me because I love J.D. Salinger's writing unspeakably deep, but also because I was using "Notes from New England" as more than a repository for selected scribbblings that had no other place in *The Cenacle*. I was establishing it as an exciting (to me) place for brand-new writing of mine.

Following this tribute is my favorite J.D. Salinger short story, "For Esmé—With Love & Squalor," a wildly dark & light wartime story which includes this passage:

When he let go of his head, [Sargeant] X began to stare at the surface of the writing table, which was a catchall for at least two dozen unopened letters and at least five or six unopened packages, all addressed to him. He reached behind the debris and picked out a book that stood against the wall. It was a book by Goebbels, entitled Die Zeit Ohne Beispiel. It belonged to the thirty-eight-year-old, unmarried daughter of the family that, up to a few weeks earlier, had been living in the house. She had been a low official in the Nazi Party, but high enough, by Army Regulations standards, to fall into an automatic-arrest category. X himself had arrested her. Now, for the third time since he had returned from the hospital that day, he opened the woman's book and read the brief inscription on the flyleaf. Written in ink, in German, in a small, hopelessly sincere handwriting, were the

words “Dear God, life is hell.” Nothing led up to or away from it. Alone on the page, and in the sickly stillness of the room, the words appeared to have the stature of an uncontested, even classic indictment. X stared at the page for several minutes, trying, against heavy odds, not to be taken in. Then, with far more zeal than he had done anything in weeks, he picked up a pencil stub and wrote down under the inscription, in English, “Fathers and teachers, I ponder ‘What is hell?’ I maintain that it is the suffering of being unable to love.” He started to write Dostoevski’s name under the inscription, but saw—with fright that ran through his whole body—that what he had written was almost entirely illegible. He shut the book.

Finally, *Labyrinthine*. More passages about the Beast. More lines from *Many Musics* which mix with dream journal passages which mix with rants which form narratives that wrap in & through each other. This passage as flavor & example:

“Beauty is sexual,” as though one could define or equal the other yet it’s been said, many times, now
reck it on this bathroom wall, written carefully in a ragged space between the cocks & cunts &
assholes & whores phone numbers, & in two colors no less, black letters & red outlines, the red ink
from a leaky pen so splotches, yet give a closer look to how like blood those splotches are, how like
declarative violence, how like it, & a chance moment it’s dusk & the high window above this single
pisser scatters light through this cement room & some kind of refracting sheen hits this
spot these words & the whole thing pulses like fuck if I know what this is a carefully marked confession? what
else can it be? it pulses now & is that the unevenness of the cement or how it is lacquered or may be strays splashes of
piss wet then drying & again & the light & the two colors of ink & the cocks & cunts & asshole that surround
it what the fuck when something so casual begins to feel like more more than a confession more than instructions
a more desperate man might call it revelation & try to figure it out & follow it along & I don’t think I am that
man but I don’t know that I’m not

My kind of fun.

So this was the issue, along with *World’s Window*, that we handed out at the 12/18/2010 Jellicle Guild meeting. To Jim Burke III, to newcomer (& SP Radio DJ) Jeremy Kilar (rode up from New Jersey, picked up Jim in Connecticut), & to Melissa. Two guitars this meeting (Jim’s & Jeremy’s) By proxy, both audio & video, we had Ric Amante, Martina Newberry, Judih Haggai, David Hartley, and Chris Gose. It has really added to meetings since 2010 to blend in videos & audios from contributors who can’t make it in person.

Meeting over, the work of the press winding down for the year. While visiting Kassi’s kin in snowy Colorado for Christmas, & also while we celebrated our anniversary up in snowy Maine on New Year’s Eve, I worked on promoting these two publications online, starting of course with *The ElectroLounge*, getting them the many readers they deserved.

This chapter has taken me several years to write. I’ve started, stopped, resumed, seen *Cenacle* issue after issue go by, by time’s necessity.

But I finally decided I had to finish it. Before the memories calcified too much, distorted too much by more & more occurring between then & now.

I was jobless. I had Kassi. I had my pen. I was back in Boston. I’d parted Burning Man. Some of Boston was changed, some not. My loved ones were still local.

I felt hopeful despite. Felt that I would find work, would do better by my pen, my loved ones, my world, my self. Would try, & try, & fail, & try, & fail, & try again.





Joe Coleman**After Thought**

This flesh could fly . . .
This crawling creature . . . climb . . .
if not for unseen strings
(tethered as we are by time)
and want of wings.

So it is we knot a noose
in rotten rope,
then hang our hope
on brittle bough,
longing to break loose,
heaven seeming nearer now.

The soul should soar.
The steady eye in stretching sky
watches dreams be dashed and die.
Falling is what flight is for.

* * *

Music by Night (for J.H.)

Fine-tuned body beckoning,
I dream you are made of wood and string:
a precious rare violin or guitar.
My instrument. I play an opening bar—

Your shapely contours start to sing.
Your curves are cradled in gentle grip
and even as you are slumbering,
you thrill to my master-musicianship.

Then, virtuosos, we share duets—
your breasts, my chest, our stomach frets.
We languidly strum in harmonic ascent,
each as the other's accompaniment,
through memorized movements restraint forgets.

Vivaldi's *Concerto for Pleasures in B*.
Beside you, upon me, instinctively,
we resonate under talented fingers.
The motif circles, climbs, and lingers,
extending our rapture, sustaining one note—

Two lovers nestle neck against throat—
both of us instruments, players. Both singers.
Well-rehearsed. Nimble. Adagio.
Guitar and vocalist. Violin. Bow.

The most sublime music as has ever been—
crescendo of delicate flesh touching skin.
The graceful guitar—The bowed violin—
The instruments wake—
Let the concert begin.

* * *

Sport

I'm a bench warmer:
call me third-string.
My batting stats are low.
I'm penalized for holding,
forfeit letting you go.

This is an odd competition:
You are the perfect catch.
I, butterfingere, fumble.
We're an uneven match.

Why do I bother to practice?
I don't know the rules of your game.
Someday I'll be inducted
into the Hall of Blame.

With every pass intercepted,
I walk off the field alone,
then hit the lockers and shower.
You have defended your zone.

It never was much of a contest.
I didn't manage to score.
You are a gifted opponent.
I don't want to play any more.

I guess I am done with athletics.
I get injured whenever I care.
I'll never be anyone's teammate.
I am not a very good player.

* * *

Ghosts

They do not float upon the stair,
nor lurk behind a darkened door.
Ghosts do not sleep beneath your bed,
amidst the clothes cast on the floor.

They don't inhabit closet space.
No dusty attic is their home.
'Tis broken pieces of the heart
ghosts choose to haunt and roam.

* * * * *





Lull, or Scenes from Everyday Life

[Travel Essay]

The family hut near Cabaña Supernatura

Xiomara is playing with her baby brother Miguelito, who last year was a bump in Katia's belly. Doña Maribel is washing dishes on the hut, don Joaquín washing clothes in the river. Rufino just motor-canoed off in the direction of Lago Agrio to pick up eight European tourists. With him are Alfonso, a Quitoian guide who looks like a stick-figure Sylvester Stallone; Alfonso's light-hearted, generously-proportioned girlfriend from New York, Nora; and Alfonso's employee, a 16-year-old Quitoian cook named Ché.

Xiomara is folding clothes. Miguelito tries to unfold them. She distracts him for a moment with an inflatable plastic zebra that squeaks, but the clothes are more compelling.

Maribel's chickens dash between the other house and this one like fat, feathered velociraptors.

One of Joaquín's hunting dogs trots up to the other, wagging and licking. Potente (po-TEN-tay), the skinny, tan-and-white one, wants to play, but Cuauquillo (kwow-KWEE-yo), the black one, plays hard-to-get. Now they chase each other.

Potente's name is ironic, because, as Alfonso says, "*Potente es impotente*." The dog is submissive, skinny, and easily driven away. Even now, he's losing this play fight that he picked. Still, he doesn't seem to mind.

His brother Cuauquillo is the potent one. Cuauqui is named after the screaming piha, a little gray bird with a piercing, soaring call like *kwow-KWEE-yo*. The bird normally lives in the deep forest, far from any river. One morning when the dog was a nameless puppy, a screaming piha came close to Joaquín's hut and sang, then headed back into the forest. The puppy jumped up and followed the bird deep into the woods. When he came back in the late afternoon, Joaquín gave him its name. Since then, he has been a tireless and talented hunter.

My instant coffee is still too hot to drink, so this paragraph is guaranteed to be dull. My arm is stiff from swinging the half-sharpened machete I bought in Lago. One toe is bruised where I walked into a stump. As I watch an ant struggling on the surface of the coffee, I miss the Café Trieste. It's 7:30 in the morning. I'm in a chambira hammock I've used in ceremonies. I remember its firm support last year as I gripped its webbing, screaming and pounding the floor, and last week as I bucked, puking out my—for lack of a better word—sin.

There's a *Smack! Smack! Smack!*—don Joaquín washing his clothes in the river. A little green parrot, kept as a pet, shrieks as it looks for food at the edge of the floor. Doña Maribel heads down to the river with a double armload of laundry. I'd rather be active, washing my own clothes, but I want to stay off this toe. Though that might be just an excuse. So now's the time to plunge ahead as a writer. Scrawl something I can publish one day. Words struggle in the gray darkness of my brain, race like spermatozoa to fertilize the page.

Yesterday, the pond we get drinking water from was full of tadpoles.

Now, Mecías, about six, is playing a toy flute, a green plastic snake.

Stored in the palm-thatched roof is the mamecócó, the leaf fan, which I picked up during the ceremony last week. Fresh then, it's withered now, lighter and less flexible, and it makes a drier rustle when shaken. It whispers.

The lower part of this slanting roof is used for storage. Objects are jammed through the overlapping palm fronds. In the kitchen area above the gas stove, lids, wooden spoons and toothbrushes are wedged alongside two hand-carved canoe paddles, two shotguns, and Rufino's blowgun.

Joaquín told Alfonso, Nora, and me that when he drank yagé a few months ago, the spirits of three species of birds came to him, looking like tiny humans playing drums and singing: the *pisasabaj*, the *wekopiabaj* and the *toankeabaj*. “¡Qué lindo cantando!” he beamed at us—how beautifully they sang. They told him to give us their names. So Alfonso is Pisasá, Nora is Wekopiá, and I'm Toanké—the toanké being a type of woodpecker.

Today I tape-recorded an English language textbook for Domingo Piaguaje, a community leader in the Secoya village of San Pablo upriver.

A butterfly, orange, black, and clear, lands on an empty bottle of Mexana antiseptic lotion. I dub it Domingo. It's of the same species as the ones that licked the sweat off my hand on the Rio Cononaco in Waorani territory. The Mexana bottle lies in the drying mud near the planks that lead to the stair-post that leads to the elevated floor of this hut that leads to my body that leads to this page that leads to you—the reader, the listener, the watcher through my eyes, the unseen character in this book.

The floor of this hut is made with split palm trunks, strong and flexible. If an old person falls on it, they won't break a hip. I just saw another advantage: when Miguelito peed on it, the pee just dripped through the cracks. His mom tossed a bowl of water on what was left, and that was it.

Umú birds—oropendulas—cackle and bloop their yellow and black songs in the trees. Again there's a *Smack! Smack!* from down below. A wet, soapy piece of clothing is being smacked against the surface of the river in order to work the soap deeper into the fabric and physically dislodge contaminant particles. Domingo comes back and flexes its long black-orange clear wings in the late afternoon sun. In Cabaña Supernatura, a radio muttered briefly before playing more salsa music. Up in Michigan, my girlfriend Deirdre waits on customers at the restaurant where she works. Maybe her dad has a new job now. I have a new bead bracelet again, a single multicolored strand that Joaquín made me. The sun casts the shadow of the chambira weave of this hammock on my left arm. Bugs bug me. Truly, nothing bugs like bugs. A blowgun dart is stuck in the leaves of the ceiling.

Other people's perceptions of me can feel like a blowgun dart stuck in my flesh. To people who have known me a long time, I'm the emotionally damaged casualty of a nasty divorce, and, in their presence, that's who I believe myself to be. It's as if their perception, their opinion of me, shoots out of their eyes. And I'm thin-skinned. To others I meet later, I'm edgy, unsure of myself, afraid of my shadow. I believe in magic, which makes me eccentric and maybe delusional. As soon as I cross the border into the southern lands, though, I'm a spiritual seeker studying indigenous thought, which is a perfectly acceptable social category. My gringo-hood lends credibility to the *indigenistas*, who are able to say, “Look, even gringos value our *cosmovisión*.” Thus, my position is stronger here than it is up north.

Morning. Xiomara combs her long hair. Miguelito, a baby Buddha, grabs the comb. Rufino's tourists are going to Pañayacu today. The name is Kichwa and means Piranha River.

No, they're going to Shushufindi, quite a bit upriver. I don't know what Shushufindi means.

OK, it turns out that we're all going to Shushufindi.

If we stop in San Pablo, I can give Domingo his English book and the tape I made. A white hen strides through sunlight, her body blazing like a cumulus cloud.

Miguelito crawls a meter.

Alfonso-Pisasá is mad at the little green parrot for chewing chunks off the edges of the foam

sleeping mats.

Cuaucuillo has been mostly tied up since yesterday morning, his legs bound with vines, because he's *bravo*, aggressive, and nobody wants him to bite a tourist. Maribel ties him this way, firmly scolding him as she does so, reminding him of his misdeeds. Cuaucui is submissive, repentant, though it seems an act.

Rufino is giving his son Luis a haircut. The barber chair is a tree stump. Joaquín and grandson Mecías recline side by side in a hammock, looking at photos in an album. Nearby, a tame wild pig snorts. There are two of them, a brother and a sister: collared peccaries, *Pecari tajacu*. They wander freely around the place, pungent, curious, friendly, skittish, willing to be petted (their spiky fur, the solidity of their muscles), ready to hop backwards or bolt on their sharp hooves. Someone shot their mother for food a few months ago and they're being raised as pets.

Morning sounds: Maribel chopping carrots, birds chirping, people pronouncing improbable vowels and glottal stops, the green whirl of the little parrot's wings, the gold buzz of cicadas, and, always, louder or softer, this blue wind whispering in the leaves of the trees of the Amazon jungle.

As when I stayed with the Coras in Mexico, when my hosts talk, I never know what they're saying, unless they talk in Spanish, which means they're talking to me. Sometimes I hear a flow of words in Paicoca with a number in Spanish embedded in it. Or a flow of Paicoca and then a pause and the word "*entonces*," which is Spanish for "so" or "therefore," and then another flow of Paicoca.

Yesterday we didn't end up going to Shushufindi. I'm not sure why.

Yesterday I worked in the kitchen, helping make food for the tourists. In late afternoon, Joaquín came back from hunting with a big dead collared peccary—a *huangana*, to use the local Spanish term. The family and I had some for breakfast this morning. We're smoking the legs and head outside on a wooden rack over a fire.

Joaquín told me a millionaire bought a big plot of land just upriver from here a few years ago. One day the millionaire was bathing in the river. He'd soaped up and he was submerging to rinse off. A whirlpool the size of a house appeared and sucked him down. At the bottom of the whirlpool was an eight-meter-long fish called a *mero*. It gulped him down like a shot of liquor!

That *mero* had already eaten two men and a young girl there. But this time, the millionaire's brother came in and brought dynamite. They let it down on one hundred meters of line. Still not having reached the bottom, they attached another hundred meters. Then it reached bottom, and they detonated it. It didn't kill the *mero*, though, just drove it deep into its hole.

The story sounded unbelievable, yet Joaquín sounded sincere, so I listened silently, nodding, wondering if it could be true.

Now, Xiomara sucks on a boar's rib and Miguelito sucks on Katia's breast. Katia pulls the corners of his eyes and says "*Chino*" and laughs. Joaquín is sewing a ripped black-and-gray nylon sports bag at the edge of the floor. Miguelito's mouth on Mama's nipple, his big dark eyes look around. The little green parrot chews on a foam mat that's hanging over a clothesline, and Xiomara strides over and slaps the shit out of him! He tumbles squawking three meters through the air before righting himself and flying to a safe perch.

I reminded Joaquín about the ceremony last year where the devil appeared, and asked him to describe the sky people who descended to listen to his song, the ones who looked like three female angels to me. He perplexed me by saying he'd seen a crowd of *wiñawai*. The *wiñawai*, he explained, are a variety of "sky people" (*matemo bai*) that are small and multicolored, each with four brilliant crowns



stacked atop his or her head. So we saw the same devil but different angels. His were more like the ones that pulled my left foot up into Heaven a week and a half ago.

Yesterday morning, the European tourists' eight backpacks were lined up against a wall of Cabaña Supernatura, ready to get loaded into a canoe for the trip out, and Cuauquillo (who, for the moment, was not tied up with vines) snuck up on the hut like a ninja and pissed on every single one of them. It's like he wanted to conquer Europe by marking it as his territory. But Maribel caught the conqueror, tied his legs together with a thin, flexible vine, and beat him with a thick, heavy vine while he yelped his insincere repentance.

Observing this, Rufino remarked that, last year, an Ecuadorian graduate student in Biology fractured his leg playing soccer with some Secoyas on the beach at the other side of the Aguarico. Afterwards he was lying in the cabaña in a hammock in pain. Cuauqui snuck up and pissed on his head.

We all headed out to the airport in Lago Agrio. The plane brought a father and daughter from upstate New York, Sam and Lisa, and flew away with the eight Europeans and their eight stinky backpacks of canine territorial demarcation. At a restaurant, a friend of Alfonso-Pisasá's, a Chilean sculptor, joined us, having arrived by bus.

I was planning to start writing immediately after breakfast, but I got really anti-dirt and swept out Cabaña Supernatura, then washed myself and my clothes and deforested my face. Lisa and Sam and Nora-Wekopiá are off on a walk with Daniel, a neighbor who works with Rufino. Rufino and Alfonso-Pisasá are off in Lago picking up a batch of high school students from the USA.

Ché the cook caught a passing canoe upriver this morning, inviting me to stay at his family's hostel in a neighborhood called Guapulo when I get back to Quito. "*Es muy chevere*," he said about the hostel, and then had to explain *chevere* to me: it means cool. Hostal Labirinto, the place is called. I'll check it out.

We were hiking with the students in single file in the forest on the other side of the river. Rufino and Alfonso-Pisasá and I had machetes and everyone else was unarmed. An unbelievably loud, deep growl throbbed and reverberated in the air. It was impossible to tell where it had come from. It seemed to come from all directions. Maybe the animal was right above us. Nobody said anything. Three hands gripping three machetes, we kept walking with our hearts pounding in our chests.

We took the students to the beach for a swim. Afterwards, most went back to Supernatura on the boat but two guys swam back across the river with me. We drifted with the current, floating on our backs under the blue sky, the white clouds, and then the green overhanging branches of some tall trees that leaned out over the water. We landed right where we had intended to. I caught hell from their tour leader for letting them swim across with me, but I didn't care.

The students left this morning without their backpacks having been pissed on. At least North America will be free from Cuauqui's domination. A mother hen and her brood cluck and cheep under the floor. An oropendola bleeps, cicadas whirr, a cricket tries a few notes, and a butterfly opens and shuts its black-orange-and-clear wings repeatedly as it rests on Joaquín's newly-repaired black-and-gray

nylon sports bag.

Joaquín was sitting in his hammock reckoning his age. "Let's see," he mused. "This year, 68. Next year, 69. Next year, 80. Next year, 82."

I spoke up. "What about 70? You left out ten years. After 69 comes 70. Then 71, 72, all the way up to 80."

He shot me a look of annoyance and said, "What do you know?"

A good question. I didn't have an answer. But I did think about it.

I just had a sudden pang of missing Deirdre. I wonder what will happen when I get back next month. We love each other but we don't really go together very well.

Two priests and two Waorani stopped by here in a motor-canoe. They're looking for information on the whereabouts of the Tagaeri, the wild Waorani. No one has seen any sign of them around here.

After they left, Joaquín reminisced about Alejandro Labaka, the bishop who the Tagaeri killed. Labaka visited here for a while and he and Joaquín became buddies. *Ají Cabeza*, Chili Pepper Head, is Joaquín's nickname for him. Joaquín related a story that Labaka had told him. When Labaka went with the Waorani, he wanted to dress like them, which meant being naked except for a chambira string tied around his foreskin and wrapped around his waist. The problem was that for some reason the bishop was circumcised and had no foreskin. So he tied the head of his penis in the string. This made the head of his penis look like a chili pepper, setting the Waorani off into hurricanes of laughter. They yelled "Chili Pepper Head!" and rolled on the ground laughing. Joaquín chuckled at the memory of the bishop's story.

I was lying in the dark at the far end of Cabaña Supernatura, rocking in a hammock. Cuaucuillo snuck up on the hut with a *click, click, click* of claws and came up to me. I could dimly see his tail wagging. I scratched his scarred head and he licked my chin. I was rubbing his neck when I heard footsteps. A flashlight blinked on. Xiomara made an exclamation, half surprise, half disgust, switched off the flashlight, and walked away.

We psychonauts are like the dogs. Humans are normally not allowed up on the higher levels of the universe because we're dirty, stinky, not too bright. But ayahuasca is a numinous being who bends the rules and lets us up once in a while to sniff around and get petted.

Alfonso, Nora, and the Chilean sculptor left yesterday at dawn, so now I'm the only *anke* (outsider) left here. The sculptor was loaded up with valuable hardwood he'd scavenged and bought. He asked me to bring him another small log of it when I go to Quito.

After they motored away, there was a long series of horrifying screams. When they stopped, and I finished my instant coffee and animal crackers, I went over and had a look. Rufino and Daniel were butchering two pigs. I gradually learned there was going to be a party. A few hours later, sixty Secoyas showed up to feast and drink.

I got tipsy on fermented *chicha*, danced, had a good time. At one point I was heading down off the family hut. The stairway was a foot-wide log with three notches cut into it as steps. From the edge of the roof hung a knotted piece of twine for people to hold onto when they went up or down the stairs. I gripped the twine well enough, but mis-stepped, and in an instant both the log and I were falling. We thudded to the ground, a piece of snapped twine in my hand, and I burst out laughing.

Now I'm swinging back and forth in a hammock, nauseous. The only food I've had yesterday and today was pork and *aq* (yuca flatbread), with instant coffee to wash it down.

Doña Maribel and I are the only ones here. The others motored away to drop off the last of the guests who slept over. Maribel just chopped down a palm tree. Now she's using its wood to smoke the leftover pork. I'll have to write a lot, quickly, to keep from feeling guilty about all work she's doing.

The collared peccaries smell really rank. Often you can smell them before you see them.

On the way to the drinking pond, there's a little tree with tiny orange flowers that smell like pineapple and vanilla.

One of the peccaries crunches a pig bone under the floor.

If the Waorani language sounded like rubber bands being strummed, then Paicoca is like sharp metal crescents, full of tonal curves and sudden starts and stops.

I bathed. I always feel better after a dip in the river. Sometimes I feel like I fit in here.

I have to vent spleen, though. There's a popular TV show called *Dos Mujeres, Un Camino*, which means *Two Women, One Path*. It's about a married truck driver who falls in love on the road. It has three theme songs, and they're all in a row on the cassette tape that the kids here play six times a day on their boom boxes. So that's eighteen times *dos mujeres*, which gives you thirty-six *mujeres* and eighteen *caminos*.

I'll talk more about *mujeres* and *caminos* later. Now I want to describe the behavior of the peccary siblings.

An hour ago, when I was going down to bathe, they were following me, showing me how they play-fight with each other, biting necks, ears, and legs, and suddenly freezing in threat postures, and suddenly jumping forward to bite. Sometimes they do something else, too. They press their sides together, facing opposite directions, and each rubs his or her chin fast and hard, maybe a dozen times, against the lower back of the other. They must be sharing their scent by stimulating their musk glands. They complete one another, an odorous yin-yang symbol.

Miguelito, in a blue plastic bath basin, plays with a deflated pink plastic quadruped, splashes and hums. He always wears a necklace and a bracelet, single strings of multicolored beads strung in random order on fishing line.

Now those *Dos Mujeres, Un Camino* songs are on again. Today has been frustrating and lonely, with flashes of alleviation. I chased away a cow that came near here from its proper area downriver. That was the day's excitement. In the evening I boiled some spaghetti, and added a can of mackerel in tomato sauce, and two of the tiny, super-hot chili peppers from one of the chili pepper bushes. Luis, Mecías, Xiomara, Joaquín, and I all had some.

"¡Peshcado ... shabrocho!" Joaquín exclaimed brightly, and his grandkids laughed. He explained. The phrase came from a tour in Cuyabeno a few months ago. A tourist from New York, about Joaquín's age, spoke no Spanish. Joaquín caught fish for dinner. The guy wanted to know how to say "The fish is tasty," *El pescado es sabroso*, so he could compliment Joaquín, but all he could memorize was "¡Peshcado ... shabrocho!" That became a running gag between him and Joaquín for the remainder of the trip.

I'm lonely. The people here are nice, but I miss my home and the people there. Of course, when I'm there, I want to be here. My writing is my portable home.

Two hammocks are drying in the sun after a wash. Don Joaquín and Miguelito are in a third. It's made of chambira. One of the washed ones is made of store-bought cotton string. Cotton hammocks are inferior because they sag a bit when you sit in them, unlike chambira ones, which are perfectly firm. Pushing off with his heels and swinging high, Joaquín tickles his grandson, who whoops with joy. Joaquín stops the hammock, lies back in it, and tosses the laughing baby up in the air and catches him again and again, cooing, "¡Papíto-níto!"

At the edge of the floor, Xiomara, her head bent into her task, long black hair swaying, hacks a pig jawbone in half with a machete. She and Mecías suck out the marrow.

Luis arrives and throws on the *Dos Mujeres, Un Camino* tape and sings along. I wonder if he's ever seen the show. And if he wonders what it would be like to have two women. Don't we all? But one at a time is probably enough. Even one can be too many sometimes. A supervisor of mine at Café Trieste, who once choked me for inadequately filling up a sugar dispenser, complained to me about what bitches all the women in his life had been. And then there was a Secoya teenager in a blue tunic at the party the other day who proclaimed to me and the Chilean sculptor, "Woman is death."

I piously retorted, "No, woman is life. You want to keep living on the earth after your death, you need a woman. You plant your seed in the ground, in the woods, it won't grow. You need to plant it in a woman for life."

Take my supervisor, for instance. He's a nervous, temperamental, violent, drug-crazed ex-marine, and he has a fine young son by a beautiful Filipina who constantly sponges him for money. If that isn't the beginning of immortality, what is?

Often, I pray that if the time comes, I'll be able to be a good husband and father, even though it's hard to imagine taking care of other people when I can barely take care of myself.

As I pray to the Great Spirit, or God for short, I understand that it's possible that he/she/it doesn't exist, but I feel that a prayer like that is good for my mind whether or not anyone can hear. And I sometimes have dialogues with the possibly-nonexistent Supreme Being.

Me: God, please make me responsible, wise, and good.

God: Do it yourself.

Me: OK, please allow me to become responsible, wise, and good.

God: Allow yourself to do it.

These conversations are like table tennis matches, in which God wins every point.

* * * * *



Judih Haggai

perfect reflection
all is crystal clear
where's my pen?

* * *

before it begins
a plan for the day
may i be safe

* * *

after your visit
emptiness glow
silent orchestra

* * *



streaks of light
guide my path
dream exploration

* * *

fat full moon
lolls in the 5 am sky
in wait of a friend

* * *

again explosions
sounds of war back for encore
as i sip coffee

* * *

complete silence
my favourite accomplice
sunday before dawn

* * *

daytime leaves
evening scent of jasmine
poetry weather

* * *

this moment
the quiet paths
surround me

* * *

an empty vessel
fills with chance memories
constant clean-up

* * *

again instructions
just follow the mobius strip
long way home

* * *

mind float
above body
one kite string away

* * * * *

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 Editor: Algermon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Written: Donald Byrdioril Bunny

Bagzend Getz a F

Trubel, trubbl, trubll, nuthin' but
 trubblin' Bagzend. Ferst you bld
 pal no Algermon Getz reat'ly si k'p'paz
 Ramy can't Mees Ghreeds, waz p'mo
 glikking Bagzend. Now Bagzend is
 doin' legat'la fantas'land. I am shat
 even? suppos'd Mtoo write "Bagzend
 News" by the Sholela told me that
 Iggy was in Iggy Bagzend was
 gonna get bak the things a zlot
 azul.

The problems startid not
 to long after I got both Ramy
 an me were sittin' on the Bunyo
 familis' TV room lookin' at a
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 Ramy got from Leo Ramy was
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Bags End Book #3: Bags End Gets a F.

This story and more Bags End writings
can be found at: www.scriptorpress.com/bags-end.pdf

Introduction

Hello Cenacle readers,

Mah name is Algernon Beagle & I am the editor guy for Bags End News. Bags End News is a newspaper about mah homeland, a fantasyland called Bags End.

From the outside, Bags End looks like 3 brown-colored laundry bags piled up on a little chair in the corner of our friend Miss Chris's bedroom in Connecticut. Miss Chris is 5 years old, & has a toy tall boy brother named Ramie, who is 17.

Inside, Bags End is sort of like an apartment building of levels but, cuz it is a fantasyland, nobody knows about its top or bottom. Most levels look like regular hallways, with doors to rooms & other places running up & down their lengths.

Each level is connected to the one above & the one below by ramps that are good for folks with legs & others without. Strangely, the other end of each level ends in a sudden edge, so be warned, should you come to visit.

The Cenacle editor guy, who is a cousin to my friend & Miss Chris's brother Ramie, invited me to share some of the stories from mah newspaper, now & again. He also helped with the typing & some of the spellings, to make this book presentable here. I love English but I still don't spell it too great.

Anyway, I hope you enjoy these stories from Bags End, a place near & dear to mah heartbone.

Bags End Gets a F.

Trouble, trouble, trouble, always nothing but trouble in Bags End. Now Bags End is a illegal fantasyland. I am not even supposed to write Bags End News, but Sheila told me that Iggy or no Iggy the Inspector, Bags End was gonna get back to things as usual.

The problems started one day when Ramie the Toy Tall Boy were sitting in the Bunny Family's TV room, looking at a underground music comic book that Ramie gotted from Leo the Dark Man, who is a comic book collecting fiend. Ramie was reading me a story about a band named R.E.M. & how their leader Michael Stipe was using his slurred lyrics power against the Top 40 Monster. Mah little sister Margie Bunny was watching "Mr. Rogers Neighborhood," which is a pretty good TV show.

Anyway, all of a sudden the front door crashed open & Sheila Bunny hopstomped in. Her purple eyes looked almost red she was so mad.

Margie yelled, "Bug Bunny!" & hopped after Sheila. She thinks many guys in Bags End are really from the cartoons she watches. Me & Ramie didn't hear nothing for a minute and then we heard Sheila yell, "Take off, kid!" & out hopped Margie. She was crying. Mah adopted mommy Pat Bunny came in from the kitchen. I told her Sheila was real mad about something. Pat went into Sheila & there was some more yelling & then Pat came out with a real serious look.

"What's wrong, 'dopted Mommy?" I asked.

"Big trouble. Bags End just got an F from the Inspector."

Well, I didn't know what this really meant until later that day when I was gonna go to Imagianna to visit my friends, Princess Chrisakah & her servant Boop, who looks like a turtle but isn't one.

The door I usually use to go to Imagianna was locked tight. I went to find Ramie & I tried to call Crissy on the RamiePhone. You use his hand like a hearing piece and talk into his ear. After dialing the number on his face, of course.

But all I heard on the RamiePhone was, "We're sorry, we cannot complete your call as dialed. Please hang up & try the number again, or ask your operator for assistance. This has been a recording, 42864." I tried arguing with the guy who kept saying that but he wouldn't listen.

So I went to see Sheila. I found her slouched down in her throne, chewing a carrot (O! Yuk!) & reading a story she told me was called "Life Without Principle" by Hank Thoreau. Sheila likes Hank.

"Sheila, I can't get the door to Imagianna open. Did you lock it?"

Sheila looked mad again & she threw her carrot (O! Yuk!) against the wall.

"He really meant it! He wasn't kidding. I will pound him!" Sheila yelled like a mad bunny. I hid behind her throne like a professional coward.

Finally, it got quiet beyond the back of the throne. "Beagle, get out here! I have an errand for you!" Sheila yelled. She sounded less crazy, so I came out.

Sheila sat back in her throne. "Algernon, bad times are here. I should've known it would happen, sooner or later."

"What's wrong, Sheila?"

"I will tell you when I tell everyone else."

"Does it have to do with Bags End getting a F? Are we gonna stay back a grade?" I was trying to figger out how a fantasyland stays back a grade.

"Just tell everyone to come to the Bags End Auditorium today at 4." Then Sheila picked up her Thoreau story & left. I hurried all over Bags End telling people.

At 4, everyone was gathered there & ready. Sheila came on the stage with Iggy the Inspector. Most everyone knew that Iggy had given Bags End a F so lots of guys booed him. I even heard mah silly Bumping brother Alexander Puppy yell, "Bump!" & then I heard that language-knowing guy Allie Leopard yell, "He said Boo!"

Sheila had sat down on a chair on the stage to listen to Iggy talk, but when the booing kept up, she stood up & yelled, "Quiet!" That made things quieter.

Iggy looked kind of nervous. "As most of you know, Bags End has been getting D-'s for a long time. I am afraid that I let my personal fondness for Sheila get in the way of my duty. None of you out there shows the least interest in making Bags End a good fantasyland--"

"I make my twoops mwarch almost every dway!" yelled that silly red-haired baby Sargent Lisa-Marie Chow.

"I will defeat Jones & liberate the Bunny Pillows 1 day soon!" whisper-yelled crazy Betsy Bunny Pillow.

"I set a Hide & Go to Sleep game record last week!" yelled Ramie, who is the best Lazybug in Bags End.

"Bump Bump-Bump-Bump!" yelled Alex.

"He said he has almost finished his Bump-Gibberish dictionary!" yell-translated Allie Leopard.

"Button your lip or my fist will slip!" yelled Sheila.

"Thank you, Sheila," said Iggy. "Those things are all wrong. Fantasylands have nothing to do with any of that. You're supposed to have good clean adventures. You're not supposed to be lazy or vengeful or idiosyncratic in those ways."

"Hey, Sheila, what's idiosyncratic?" someone yelled.

"It means weird. Now quiet, beagle!" Sheila said.

"O! Rats!" I muttered.

"I have been an Inspector for a long time & I have seen a lot of changes. Seems to me the Committee may see things in too black-&-white terms these days. I will do what I can for you. Until things change, however, I have a job to do. As you may have already noticed, all doorways to other fantasylands are closed. This goes for the doorway to Connecticut. I believe a toy in the audience is from Connecticut. You must leave now, Ramie."

Ramie got up to leave. Everyone yelled, "Don't go, Ramie!" but I knew he had to go. He was a very sad toy.

Iggy started talking again. "It is also my sad duty to tell you that if Bags End doesn't fix its problems in 1 month's time, it will be cancelled. This means that the powers that protect it will cease. This surely would be the end. I have left with Sheila a list of the things that need to be repaired or changed. I will be back in 1 month to do my inspection. Good luck." And with that, Iggy left.

Well, everyone started yelling & things were crazy for awhile. Several constitutional amendments were quoted, plus Plato, Martin Luther King, Jr., & John Lennon. Sheila just kept quiet, watching it all. Finally, everyone quieted down without her yelling.

"It's time for me to tell you about what me & Iggy have been dealing with all these years." Everyone listened quietly.

Bags End Tries to Be Good.

None of us knew much about Iggy the Inspector until now except he would give fantasylands grades. Places like Oz & Narnia always got A's & Bags End always got D-'s.

"I have known Iggy since I was little. He came to Bags End 1 day & said he was the Inspector & that we would get a grade every month," Sheila began.

"That was a long time ago, before Bags End got so idiosyncratic like it is now. The grades kept going down & down. Me & Iggy would have long arguments when he would tell me we were gonna get an F. He would give in & give us another D-, & I would give him a jug of carrot juice to take on his way."

"O! Yuk!" somebody yelled.

"Cork it, beagle!" Sheila yelled back.

"O rats," I muttered.

"What we really argued about was why Bags End would get bad grades. You see, Iggy doesn't make the final decision. He reports to the Committee & they make the final choice. I asked my pal Princess Crissy about what all this stuff was about. She told me that back in the 1920s, all the really good fantasylands got together & sort of joined up. They would visit each other & help protect each other. It wasn't anything formal or anything.

"Then things get strange. Crissy says a Committee of magical beings brung Princess Ozma, Mister Badger, Peter Pan, Queen Alice, Christopher Robin & Pooh Bear together, & offered to protect them. The thing is that nobody felt in danger so I guess they said yes to be polite. Aslan & Narnia joined in the 1950s, & we did later, & I guess there are a couple of others. The protection had 1 requirement & that was that an Inspector be allowed to inspect the purity of the lands once a month."

Sheila stopped talking for a second. "For the longest time, the Committee did nothing harmful. Iggy would tell me of the older days when they would try to get more members. I don't really understand it but apparently the more fantasylands that join up, the more powerful the protection. The Committee even tried to get dream-worlds & hippie hallucination lands to join. Of course I figured out that it all has to do with the imagination. Freedom through strength to imagine, to fix a broken quote.

"Then things started to get bad. Iggy brung me a book of requirements. It seems that some kinds of imagination are better than others. What that means to us is that bumping, & hating food, & marching up & down, & inciting revolution, & even letting my mayor's paperwork go undone will get us in trouble."

"Why, I will smother the Committee!" whisper-yelled Betsy.

"I will thwow thwem in the bwig!" declared Sargent Lisa.

"Bump Bump Bump!" yelled Alexander.

"He said he will give them a stern lecture on moral coercion!" yelled Allie Leopard.

"Quiet!" yelled Sheila even louder. Everybody quieted.

"Before we do anything, let me tell you that as your Mayor I have done my best

to protect you. Iggy promised me that Bags End will not go the way of acid dreams & cancelled TV fantasy shows. We have to do better but I told Iggy that we will not change. I told Iggy that we will not do 'Say No to Drugs' commercials & that I will keep playing checkers with Godd. I also told him that Bump language & finicky beagles & babys who like to be sargents & most importantly jazz will always be a part of Bags End. He tried to convince me to put muzak in the hallways & for us all to go on a world tour of shopping malls & to make guest appearances on late night TV talk shows. Never!" she yelled.

Everybody cheered.

"What we do have to do is be nicer. Now I am requiring that everybody in Bags End go to Be Nice classes with the Blondys every Sunday after Sunday school. And for the grumpier Bags End friends, Algernon will be their Polite Tutor."

Nobody liked this idea much & a lot of people gave me dirty looks.

Sheila ended the meeting then. The Be Nice classes began right away. Guys like Betsy & Lisa & Leo got sent to me for polite lessons. They were rough students. Betsy threatened to smother me a lot & Lisa kept telling me to call her swir. Leo kept promising me comic books if I would end the lesson early. I didn't though, cuz Sheila said she would pound me into beagle dust if I did anything like that. She got a polite lesson or 2 herself.

Anyway, by the time the Season of Lights holiday came, everybody was a lot nicer. Or so they seemed. I warned Sheila that I didn't think it was gonna work.

The Season of Lights was kind of a sad holiday. It ended just a couple of days before Iggy was due to make his inspection. We didn't see Emmi the Bag Lady Artist or Princess Crissy or even Miss Chris & Ramie. They all sent cards & pictures & stuff but it wasn't the same.

The night before Iggy was to arrive, Sheila called me & the guys I was tutoring into the Throne Room. She wanted to make sure I had done my job well.

She went up to Betsy. "Supposing I offered you a balloon with Farmer Jones' face on it?" Betsy crazy hates balloons.

Betsy said as nicely as she could, "No, thank you, have a nice day."

"Sargent Lisa, what if someone wants to take a nap, not a hike?" Sheila said.

"I would wish them pwsent dweams," said Lisa.

Sheila asked a lot of questions but everyone did well. I was proud of mah students, but I still had a bad feeling about Iggy's inspection.

Iggy Does His Inspection!

Well, the day came for Iggy the Inspector to do his inspection of Bags End. If he didn't think we passed, we would get cancelled, which means the powers that protect Bags End would stop doing it. I really don't understand it all cuz I don't know what Bags End is being protected from.

Anyway, Sheila made everybody wake up real early & dress real nice. Iggy had sent Sheila a note that morning that said his inspection would be too watch what goes on during a ordinary day in Bags End & decide if that stuff is the right kind of stuff for fantasylands.

So after Sheila had made sure everybody looked OK, she said to get ready for school. As I came into the classroom, Sheila was whispering with Mr. Owl the teacher. I figgered out later they were talking about what Oliver was gonna teach that day.

"OK, students, today we're gonna talk about morality. Morality has to do with right & wrong, good & bad. There are different types of morality which would call different things good & bad."

"Like it's morally wrong for Farmer Jones to grow Bunny Pillows & sell them to rich people?" whisper-asked Betsy.

"Like it's morally right for Action Man to use his Action Man Pounding Stick on evil villains?" asked Leo the Dark Man. Action Man Comics is his favorite.

"Bump Bump-Bump Bump Bump?" asked mah silly brother Alexander.

"He said like it's morally wrong not to teach Bump language in school?" translated Allie Leopard.

I noticed during all these questions that Iggy had slipped into the classroom & was sitting in the back of the room, writing stuff down.

"Well, I think Bump language is morally silly," I said.

Alexander got this tricky smile on his face & said, "Bump Bump Bump!"

"He said he thinks morality tastes like strawberry ice cream," said Allie.

"O! Morality! Yuk!" I yelled.

"Quiet, beagle!" Sheila growled at me. I noticed Iggy kept writing.

Mr. Owl taught us some history about when this great place called Germany was taken over by this dum guy named Hitler. Everybody was real poor & Hitler promised people lots of great things if they would make him leader. Oliver said Hitler was really bad because he killed people who were different. He only liked people a certain way.

Well, everybody called Hitler names until Sheila yelled for everybody to shut up.

Pretty soon it was recess & I want to see Leo. He let me borrow his The Continuing Adventures of Cancelled TV Show Characters comic book. Mah pal Allie Leopard helped me read about Mork & Mindy watching "ALF" on TV. Mork kept yelling, "No problem? No problem, you say? Just wait till your ratings start slipping & they move you to a bad time slot & tamper with your formula. Then you will have a problem!" What a silly guy.

I hid while everybody else ate lunch (O! Yuk!) After that, Mr. Owl told us about this guy named McCarthy who had these trials for people he thought were Commoonists.

"All through history, people have been in trouble cuz their beliefs were different & unpopular. It's because some people think that if you're different then you're dangerous," Mr. Owl said.

"But sometimes that's true, you know," said Sheila.

"Yes, but you have to understand the person before you know if there's danger," said Mr. Owl.

After school, I went with mah brother Alex, my pal Allie, & mah adopted sister Margie Bunny to the Bunny Family's apartment TV room to watch "Sesame Street," "Mr. Roger's Neighborhood," "Fraggle Rock," & "The Sheila Show."

"The Sheila Show" was real short. Sheila came on stage with a book in her paws. She read a good story called "The Wall" by Jean Paul-Sartre, & then she said, "Well, goodbye," & left & the show was over.

I played with the Blondys after that. They taught me a new game they had invented. They had a magic crayon they would use to write grafitti in the middle of the air. They floated me up in the air & helped me to write, "Beagles are too big to conform." The funny thing was that Iggy didn't see that grafitti & he walked right into it. He got real mad when he saw he had that sentence wrapped around his head & the world "conform" was hanging down his back.

On Commander Q's radio program, that is so popular in Bags End, he played that night music from a festival called Woodstock. He said people listened to music & played in the mud for 3 days at this festival. Sounded kind of dirty, but fun.

All night I kept seeing Iggy going from 1 place to the next. He kept having bad luck. He crashed into Leona Lion when she was doing her leaping exercises. 1 of Betsy's Allies thought he was a pal of Farmer Jones & dragged him to Betsy to get interrogated. When Betsy found out who he was, she only asked him a couple of questions. Sheila nearly ran him over with her BunnyCycle. She wasn't being careful cuz she was mad that Iggy's inspection meant a lot more paperwork for her.

Finally, it was near bedtime & Iggy went & found Sheila in her Throne crunching a carrot (O! Yuk!) & reading a comic book to me about a guy named Michael Harrington. I don't think that guy McCarthy would have liked him.

"Hi, Iggy. Sorry about almost hitting you," said Sheila.

"Sheila, I think the harder Bags End tries to be good, the worse it gets. This is no respectable fantasyland. I am afraid my report to the Committee will have to reflect this."

Well, I think Sheila was sick of being good cuz she threw a whole pile of carrots (O! Yuk!) at him, & told him to hit the road. Iggy ranned away but I knew there was more trouble coming.



Bags End is Illegal!

After Sheila threw Iggy the Inspector out of Bags End, it was pretty quiet for awhile. Sheila told Mr. Owl there might as well not be any school since Bags End was gonna get cancelled, but that Oliver said there wasn't any reason not to have school. Sheila called Oliver a name & pretended to fall asleep in class.

I asked Sheila what would happen if Bags End got cancelled. She didn't know.

Then Polly El's mommy Mrs. El the Postmistress of Bags End brung Sheila a letter. Sheila hopped into her Throne Room & sat on her throne while she read it out loud to me.

To Mayor Sheila Bunny
& the Citizens of Bags End,

The Fantasyland Committee regrets to inform you that Bags End will cease to be
under our protection when
the reading aloud of this letter is completed.

"Don't read anymore, Sheila!" I yelled.

"Quiet, beagle! This Committee is not gonna scare me with carrot stub magic like that."

She started to read it again.

The immediate result of this will be the banning of all association between Bags End & those fantasylands still protected by the Committee. This, of course, is for moral reasons. We consider the tainting of these fantasylands with the influence of places such as Bags End & its citizens to be our highest priority to prevent.

--The Fantasyland Committee

"What's all that stuff mean, Sheila?" I asked.

"Well, first of all, it means whoever writes their letters can't write well for anything. Second, I guess Bags End is illegal."

I got real mad at this point. "What did we do wrong? I don't understand."

Sheila closed 1 of her purple eyes & looked up at the ceiling like she always does when she is thinking hard. "It's not so much what we did as what we didn't do. Bags End has too many morally gray areas for the Committee. I never really paid attention to them until it was too late."

"But what about all our pals in Narnia & Oz & Imagianna & all the other places!"

"I am sure that they won't sit still for it. Just wait & see."

I looked at Sheila closely. "How comes you're not mad!?"

"Because no matter what the Committee says, nobody is going to change Bags End."

"Do you have a plan?" I asked.

"Take off, beagle! Your monarch has royal thoughts to think!" Sheila grumbled.

So I left & waited. Being illegal wasn't much different than being legal except we couldn't see nobody. Nobody except Miss Chris & Ramie that is. The way to Connecticut was open again & so I played a lot with Miss Chris to make up for lost time. She told me she didn't care if Bags End was illegal.

"I hate Committees!" she said.

Sometimes I would even forget that Bags End was illegal until I would try to go see mah pal Princess Crissy or the Scarecrow or even Mister Toad. All those doors were still shut tight.

Then came the exciting day when Sheila told everyone to go to the Bags End Auditorium instead of school. When we all got there, we saw Sheila had her Kool Jazz Band on stage. I thought it was strange to see a show instead of going to school.

When everyone was quiet, Sheila & her band started playing 1 of her favorite Gershwin songs called "Rhapsody in Blue." I like that song a lot & I usually listen to it with mah eyes closed. I was imagining this city in the middle of the ocean & just

starting to wonder whether it would have a constitutional democracy or a monarchy when somebody yelled, "Look!" & a second later everybody was cheering cuz walking onto the stage were Aslan, Princess Ozma, Dorothy Gale, the Scarecrow, Winnie-the-Pooh, Peter Pan, Wendy, the Badger, Princess Crissy, & a whole lot of other guys from legal fantasylands!

Sheila quieted everyone down in a few minutes by yelling "shut up!" & then she explained what was going on.

"Of course none of my friends here were going to leave Bags End stranded. Me & the other head guys of the fantasylands got together in secret & have officially told the Committee that if Bags End is illegal, so is Oz & Narnia & Neverland & the River & the Hundred Acre Wood & Imagianna & Fraggles Rock & Sesame Street & all of the rest of them!"

Everybody cheered again.

"But won't the Committee get mad that they got nobody to boss around?" I asked.

"We have got enough magick among us to defeat anyone!" yelled Sheila to more cheers.

There was lots of celebration & singing & playing. I had a lot of fun but I was still worried about the Committee.

Then not long ago I was walking along with mah smart friend Lori Bunny & we were talking about doing Bags End News again. We hadn't done it during all the trouble cuz Sheila told me the Committee wouldn't allow it until I could write about a morally straight Bags End. Bags End was as crooked as ever, but Sheila had told me to get back to work, beagle, & so Lori & me were planning to write all about the trouble with the Committee.

Then we noticed a couple of hippies hanging around.

"Hey, man, can we crash somewhere around here for tonight?" asked 1 of them. I wasn't sure if the 1 who talked was a he or she cuz boy & girl hippys look alike.

"I don't think Sheila wants anyone to crash anything," I said.

"No, pup, dig, we want a temporary pad. Say, this place sure is nice."

Well, I like hippys OK but I didn't think they should be roaming around the part of Bags End where us Bags End friends live. Me & Lori brung the hippys to Sheila.

"Are you the man?" 1 of them asked Sheila, who was playing checkers with Miss Chris.

"I am the King! What are you doing here?"

"Dig, we heard this place busted the fuzz & it's clean. So we came to check it out."

Well, Sheila knows hippy talk so they rapped, which means they talked for a few minutes. Then Sheila harrumphed.

"What's wrong, Sheila?"

"Now I understand what the Committee protected us from. There are lots of strange characters who roam from fantasyland to fantasyland like hobos. The Committee protected Bags End & Oz & the others by scaring these wanderers away. Now everybody knows that the Committee isn't involved anymore & everybody wants to come here who's heard how nice it is. I wonder if the other places are having the same troubles?"

Sheila told the hippys they could stay 1 night & then she would personally throw them out. After that, me & Sheila went to see Princess Ozma.

Ozma looked frustrated. "There were real estate agents here today trying to interest me in building a Munchkin Mall. They wouldn't leave until I had them drink from the Fountain of Oblivion. After that I told them they should go to Washington D.C. & become lobbyists. It was the Scarecrow's idea actually."

Princess Crissy told me that some rich guy wanted to have a football team in Imagianna. And Aslan got real mad when these religious guys came to save his soul.

Sheila says she doesn't know which she hates more--fascism or weirdos.

The Inspector Returns to Bags End!

Then one day me & Sheila Bunny & mah silly Bumping brother Alexander

Puppy & mah pal Allie Leopard were all sitting in Sheila's Throne Room. Sheila was chuckling over a funny newspaper Ramie gaved her called Weekly World News. Alex & Allie & me were looking at a Bump comic book. All everybody in it kept saying was "Bump," so I thought that limited the plot some. Anyway, in walks Iggy the Inspector.

"Bump Bump-Bump!" yelled Alex.

"He said Bump may be morally weird but he likes it anyway. He further notes that Bump language will be taught in the Free Society," translated Allie.

"I guess I have to agree," said Iggy.

"Well, dude, I guess the Committee is kapoot. But did you know that the face of Mars is trying to warn the peoples of Earth about a massive invasion?" Sheila said, reading from her newspaper & laughing a lot.

"Sheila, I want you to know that I was only doing my job. I was the Inspector for a long time, & I always tried my best."

Sheila folded her newspaper & looked at Iggy for a few minutes. "Iggy, the more I learn about life, the less sure I am about things. And this may seem strange but would you like to stay the Inspector?"

Me & Allie & Alex were so surprised that we didn't say nothing.

"Sheila, are you kidding?" said Iggy.

Sheila shook her head. "No. I talked it over with Ozma & Crissy & Aslan & the others, & we agreed that you were wrong to go so far with the Committee, but you did try hard. The Committee is no longer in charge, so I guess you would be inspecting for the pleasure of it."

Iggy looked happy.

"Hey, Ig, does that mean Bags End is gonna get a better grade than a D-?" I asked.

Iggy scowled at me. "I doubt it."

"That's OK, Iggy," said Sheila. "Let the goody 2 shoes places like Oz & Narnia get the A's. I would rather have a good jazz record & a revolution or 2 than a good grade any day."

So I guess things are back to the usual weirdness. Sort of.

More Strange People Come to Bags End!

Sort of, indeed. The strange wanderers into Bags End didn't stop, & it started getting crazier.

Mah good pal Rich Americus, who is a guitarist with the rock & roll band Noisy Children, & also writes Galleons Lap, which is a magazine about all the famous fantasylands, plus Bags End sometimes too, writed me a letter saying he was getting more & more letters from people who wanted to know more about Bags End. Here is some of his letter:

What's Sheila like? they ask me.
Have you seen Alexander bump?
Do you know what food Algernon likes?
Is Betsy as scary as she seems?
Algernon, I must warn you that many of these people
might try to come to Bags End.
Some will be nice, some won't. Be careful.
And I should tell you too--
keep your pencil sharp!

Sheila the Small but Mighty was the guy who read me the letter, so I asked her what she thought.

She slouched down in her throne, & looked asleep for a minute. Then she said, "Beagle, this place could use some shaking up. Besides, if I don't like them, I will throw them out."

Not long after this, I was walking with mah friend Allie Leopard & mah silly Bumping brother Alexander Puppy & we were arguing about Bump language & English

like we always do. Suddenly, an old car crashed through 1 of the doors in the hallway! 2 guys sort of fell out of the car.

"That's where you want to go. Bags End! Good luck!"

The 2 guys yelled goodbye to the guy in the car before he drove away. Then they looked at me & Allie & Alex.

"Dig, man, we're searching for the hepiest cat tween here & Neervana. You seen Sheila, critters?" said the shorter of the 2. They wore silly-looking hats & dressed in sweaters & bloo jeans. The short 1 had long hair & the tall one was mostly bald except for a girl's pony tail that hung on his shoulder.

"I am not a critter & Sheila is not a cat. She is a girl bunny," I said.

Alex, who doesn't know to be suspicious of strangers, walked right up to the 2 guys & Bumped them in a friendly way. Allie explained he was saying welcome to Bump End.

"That's Bags End, ya silly Bumping brother," I muttered. I was getting annoyed.

"Dig this cat, Sonny. He's hip to a new groove. He's like circling his own sun in his own way, man," said the tall 1.

"Listen, pal, I don't see any cats around here & Alex isn't a planet." Boy! I was annoyed. I would've said more but just then there was a roar & Sheila came roaring into view on her BunnyCycle Beatrix.

"It's Sheila, man! In person!" the short one named Sonny yelled.

Well, the whole thing finally got sorted out in Sheila's Throne Room. Sonny, and the other guy, Nathaniel, were Beat poets who came to see Sheila after they read about how much she likes jazz & the Beat poets in Galleons Lap.

"But why did you come to see me? I don't write poetry," said Sheila.

Sonny the short 1 said, "It's like we heard about how you blow, man. Sweet & long, high & strong."

"Blow what?" I asked.

"Trumpet, stupid!" Sheila yelled.

"And like, that's not all. We read about that Bumping cat here. Bump poetry's where it's at, dig," said Nathaniel.

I groaned. "Bump poetry? You're kidding? How can you write poetry with only 1 word?"

Alex said, "Bump! Bump! Bump-Bump." Allie said, "He said you write it with a lot of imagination."

Well, the Beat guys stayed around for awhile. They got to see Sheila's Kool Jazz Band play on "The Sheila Show," & then they said a lot of strange words which Sheila told me meant they liked it. And they stayed up all night with Alex & Allie, writing Bump poetry. Good grief.

Little did I know I was in for mah own admirers. A few days after Sonny & Nathaniel left, these bald guys wearing long white sheets & no shoes came to see me.

"Praise be to our fellow faster, in the name of the most Holy 1," they all said together.

"Oh no, more weirdos," I said.

They all smiled a weird smile at me & said, "Are you not the most revered Al-Ger-Non who abstains from gross needs of the mortal coil, to gain greater understanding & vision?"

"What are you guys talking about? Speak English, ya dum guys!" I said.

"They don't like food either, beagle," said a Sheila-like voice behind me.

The bald guys bowed before me. "O, humble Master!" they said.

"Don't bow to me. Bow to Sheila. She is the King," I muttered.

"But we are the Sacred Devotees of Al-Ger-Non!" they said.

Sheila started laughing real loud & she sort of rolled around.

"Listen! We will chant the holy words! O! Food!" Then they stopped. "Yuk!" they yelled all of a sudden.

"That's all wrong. You don't stop in the middle," I said. "Besides, that's mah line," I said.

Now the bald guys looked scared. "We have displeased our Sacred Master by blaspheming the Sacred Chant. We must atone for our sins. We submit ourselves to the Wrath of the Mighty Al-Ger-Non!" I didn't know what the heck they were saying & Sheila was laughing too hard to tell me. Finally, she calmed down long enough to say,

Bags End News
 No. 174 August 28, 1989
 Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Problim Day in Bagzend!

Som peepel maye think that living in a plac lik Bagzend meens that yor alwez hapy an nuthing evr gos rong. Wel, tak it frum yor old chumm Algernon wen I say that somtims it seemz lik nuthing evr gos rite around heer.

Shlela the Selfproclamd Monark uf Bagzend had bin grumpyer than evr latleey. Evry tim I bothrd her she thru Karots at mah por nozbon-O! yuk! - an then ordrd me too gather them up an retern them too her. She had fites ~~&~~ with othr grumpey gys lik Betzey an Lisa awl the tim.

"Tell them to leave. It will make them happy."

"Blow like the wind," I said in a grumpy Sheila-like voice.

Well, the bald guys left after saying a bunch of other stuff that got Sheila laughing & rolling again.

Later, we were in her Throne Room.

"How come you don't just kick all those guys out?" I asked.

"I told you. It makes things interesting. You think I enjoyed Bump poetry? Of course not. Well, I did like the 1 about how I am the coolest cat that ever was or will be," & Sheila smiled & remembered that 1.

Well, if the Sacred Devotees of Al-Ger-Non are what I can expect around here, I think I would be safer under mah bed. O! Devotees! Yuk!

Problem Day in Bags End!

Some people may think that living in a place like Bags End means you're always happy & nothing ever goes wrong. Well, take it from your old chum Algernon when I say that sometimes it seems like nothing ever goes right around here!

Sheila Bunny, the Self-Proclaimed Monarch of Bags End, had gotten very grumpy lately. I guessed it was because even she was not amused by some of the strange guys that kept showing up randomly in Bags End. I guess novelty only goes so far in this world.

Every time she thought I bothered her, she would throw carrot stubs at my poor old nosebone--O! Yuk!--& then order me to gather them up & return them to her. She had fights with the other grumpy big guys too, like Betsy Bunny Pillow & Sargent Lisa-Marie Chow.

Things kept getting worse & worse until 1 day all 3 Blondys, Tammy, Sammi, & Simmi, came floating into Sheila's Throne Room. They float cuz they don't know the Law of Grabitee. They were smiling nice & they are magickal girls, & I felt safe with them around.

"Hi, Sheila!" Tammy said. She is the oldest Blondy & the Blondiest of them all.

Sheila was slouched down in her throne. "Hi," she said grumpily.

"We came to cheer you up, Sheila, cuz you have been grumpy lately. Especially since Bags End became illegal," said Sammi. She is the middle Blondy & she helps Santy Claus deliver his presents during the Season of Lights.

"You want to cheer me up? Really? Get me a lifetime supply of carrots & jazz records, & get rid of all the useless riff-raff around here! New & old!" Boy! Was Sheila grouchy!

"Boo! Grumpy!" yelled Simmi the Baby Blondy. She is a cheerleader girl & likes to talk like cheering.

"Sheila, you set the example for Bags End. If you are grumpy, then everybody else gets the same way. Since you won't cheer up, we're gonna have you help cheer up everybody else," said Tammy.

"And what if I feel disinclined toward this plan?" Sheila said in a dangerous voice.

All the Blondys smiles got smaller & Tammy said, "We might have a Blonde tear."

Well, the Blondys having a Blonde tear is a bad thing even though nobody knows what would happen. Sheila neither, so she muttered about what was the plan.

"I think there should be a Problem Day in Bags End," Tammy said.

"Well, I think every day is a Problem Day in Bags End," Sheila said rudely.

"This day would be when you sit in your throne & hear people's problems, & try to help them," said Tammy.

Sheila didn't like this idea, but the Blondys didn't give her much choice. They may be nice guys but they're tough too.

So Sheila announced about Problem Day on "The Sheila Show." She said, "If you got a problem, come see me & I will listen & try to help. It better be a good problem, though. I don't have all day for stupid things."

I thought the whole thing was rather dangerous but Problem Day came anyway.

Sheila sat slouched down in her throne, wearing her crown that's a little too big, so it kept falling off. The Blondys stood nearby & I sat in the corner so I could see what was happening from a safe distance.

The first guy to come in was mah silly Bumping brother Alexander.

He went up & gave Sheila a friendly Bump.

"Hello, citizen of Bags End, how may I help you?" Sheila asked, reading from a paper.

"Bump Bump-Bump! Bump? Bump. Bump Bump Bump! Bump!" said Alex.

Sheila glared at Tammy who said, "Alex believes that it's way past time for Bump language to be taught & spoken in Bags End. He says research proves that Bump is a far more efficient & beautiful language than English."

"What research?" I muttered from mah corner.

Sheila yelled, "Quiet, beagle! OK Alex, you & Allie Leopard can teach a class in Bump language this fall after school. Whoever wants to can join the class."

Alex looked real happy & he yelled lots of Bumps & he bumped Sheila a lot & she probably would have knocked his block off if Tammy didn't say some Bump stuff to him, & he left.

That went better than I thought. The next guy with a problem was Leo the Dark Man.

"Sheila, I hate cleaning bubble gum off the side of Bags End. It's horrible & it takes me away from my comic books," Leo said.

"Leo, you know that the only reason you're allowed to stay in Bags End is because you agreed to be Janitor. But how about this. I will give you a comic book break every day & you can build yourself a little holder for comic books on your cleaning platform."

Leo liked this idea & said thank you, & went away happy.

Sheila kept listening to problems all day, & she was helping everybody in some way. I think she even sort of liked it a little.

Then came trouble. Trouble looked just like Betsy Bunny Pillow.

Sheila said, "What problem can I help you with, pillow?"

Betsy bounced right up to Sheila's throne & said in a loud whispery voice, "I demand that you harness all of Bags End's resources to mount a full-scale attack on the evil Farmer Jones, & liberate the captive Bunny Pillows! If you can't do this, I demand that you turn the rule of Bags End over to me & my Allies!"

Sheila looked real grouchy again. "Forget it, pillow. Fight your own megalomaniacal battles. Bags End is pacifist, anti-money, & practically anarchic. Take your fascist ideas elsewhere."

Betsy got real mad. "You will regret failing to appease me, bunny! My Allies & I will take Bags End from you!"

"HA!" Sheila yelled.

The Blondys floated in between Sheila & Betsy just before they would have hit each other.

"Now, Sheila, are you going to ruin your perfect problem-solving record just cuz you & Betsy don't see eye to eye?" said Tammy.

Sheila slouched down again. "No, I don't want to. But I don't know what to do. Farmer Jones is her problem, not Bags End's."

"But she lives here & she is unhappy," said Sammy.

Sheila looked at Betsy. "Bags End doesn't go to war with anyone, get that straight. But I promise to consult with my colleagues, to try & find another way." Then Sheila hopped off her throne & right out of her Throne Room.

Me & the Blondys looked at Betsy. She whispered, "It's about time!" & she bounced away.

Sheila Bunny Meets Farmer Jones

Me & mah little chum Sheila Bunny were sitting in her Throne Room the next day, & she was thinking real hard about her promise to help Betsy liberate the bunny pillows on Farmer Jones's Bunny Pillow Farm. I was sitting in my corner, & Sheila

was slouched down in her throne, crunching a carrot (O! Yuk!), & staring at the ceiling with one of her purple eyes closed, like she always does when she's thinking.

"Are you getting any bright ideas?" I asked.

"Quiet, beagle!" Sheila said grumpily, so I knew she was stumped.

News of Sheilas thinking's must have spread all over Bags End cuz pretty soon lots of Bags End guys were coming to give Sheila suggestions.

That silly Bumping brother of mine, Alex, & Allie Leopard came in. Alex went right up to Sheila & bumped her in a friendly sort of way.

I can tell you I never would have bumped Sheila like that. But Alex doesn't know about dangerous things. She just grunted, "What?"

"Bump Bump Bump," said Alex.

Allie said, "Alex wants you to know he wants to help you free Betsy's people. He thinks you should explain very nicely that slavery is a bad thing & then maybe Farmer Jones will see the error of his ways & be nice."

I thought Sheila was gonna tell Alex that was a stupid way to deal with a bad guy, but what she said was, "How would you & Allie like to come with me & say those things?"

"Bump!" said Alex.

"He says he thinks that's a good idea. I think so too, Sheila," said Allie.

"But Sheila," I said.

Sheila glared at me. "I know what you're thinking, beagle, but we have to try out different things. I don't really know what Jones is like except for Betsy's mad ravings. How do I know what will work?"

Well, I didn't think much of this. Alex left, talking happy Bump language to Allie. A little later, that silly Sargent Lisa-Marie Chow came marching in. She saluted Sheila & said, "Gweneral Swir, I would like put thwe Army of thwe Bwabys at your dwisposal in cwarrying out the Bwunny Pwillo mission."

"You don't even like Betsy," I said.

"Down't hwassle me with the dwetails, swub-swub pwivate!" Lisa yelled. "When the gweneral is invvolved in a mission, it is my dwuty to swerve her."

Sheila looked at Lisa. "OK, Sargent. Have your troops ready to march at my command."

Lisa smiled & saluted. "Yes, swer!" Then she left yelling, "O! Gwoody! Gwoody! A mission!"

"Sheila, how come you're letting those crazy guys get involved? You could probably beat up Jones with your one-two paws!" I said.

"I know, Algernon. But if I beat him up, what good would it do? Betsy wants me to stop him from selling bunny pillows to rich people, but I don't think she wants him, or someone, from growing bunny pillows. She just hasn't thought it through like that. She's too busy fighting the battle to think about the end of the war."

This made more sense so I decided to get in on the act.

"Sheila, can I come & get the story for mah newspaper?" I asked.

"Of course," she said. The she curled up like she was gonna take a little nap. That sounded like a good idea, so I curled up in my corner & did the same thing.

Awhile later, I was waked up by this loud whispery Betsy voice.

"Well? Are my people free? Are they hiding somewhere? Where are they, O Great King?!"

Sheila opened just 1 of her purple eyes & only halfway. "Calm down, pillow. My plan is coming together nicely. I will let you know when I am ready, so until then why don't you bounce your paranoid self off somewhere & contemplate your overthrow of Bags End."

Betsy bounced right up to Sheila & looked her right into her face. "I hope your plan is a good 1. Me & my Allies will not tolerate failure!" Then Betsy bounced away.

"Boy, Sheila, she sounds scary," I said.

"Beagle, you forget I was forced into all this by the Blondys. They will keep her in line. Besides, what harm could a pillow do me?" Then Sheila went back to sleep.

So a few days later, Sheila set off with a motley crew following her. Behind her was Sargent Lisa & the Army of the Babys, Alex, Allie, & me. The Blondys floated nearby, just in case.

Behind us were Betsy & her Allies. Her Allies were all dressed in clothes that

looked like Betsy's light-blue pillow case dress with the flowers & bunnys on it, & they had on helmets & dark glasses. I muttered something about fascist organizations, but luckily Betsy didn't hear me.

It was a long march to the Bunny Pillow Farm. We were all pretty quiet.

Finally, we came to the edge of the road & beyond were all these fields. Betsy never said how big the pillow fields are! In the distance I saw a big farmhouse & barns & stuff.

I walked up to Sheila & Betsy did too.

"Well? What next? I say we launch a surprise assault & kidnap Jones!" Betsy whisper-yelled. She was getting crazy again.

Sheila glared at her. "This is my plan & we will do it my way. The Blondys are going to act as go-betweens because Jones can't hurt them. They will go talk to Jones first & then, when they're ready, Alexander & Allie will go in."

"What? Is this a joke, Sheila? That stupid puppy? This is war! Jones is the oppressor of my people! We're not here to play games!"

Now it was Sheila's turn to hop closely to Betsy & glare at her. "Listen, pillow, I didn't want to do this. But I am here & so are all these other people because they want to help you. Can't you understand that?"

Well, Betsy was quiet after that. The Blondys floated over the fields to Farmer Jones' house. The pillows in the fields must have been asleep cuz they said nothing to the Blondys.

We waited around for something to happen. Alex practiced his Bump diplomacy with Allie. Betsy was quietly consulting with her Allies. Sargent Lisa told her troops to be at ease, & she herself was so at ease she fell asleep. Sheila stared at the fields. Your old chum Algernon just waited.

Finally, the Blondys floated back to us. Simmi was yelling, "Yea, Jones!"

Sheila asked them what happened. Tammy said, "Jones told us if we wanted to talk, he would listen. He seems eager to meet you, Sheila."

"Well, I think he will just have to wait for that privilege," Sheila muttered. Then she told Alex & Allie to go with the Blondys. As they floated over the fields, I could hear Allie saying Bump stuff & Simmi cheering.

So we waited again. I had wanted to go with Alex, but Sheila said it would be best if I didn't.

"Your bad attitude toward Bump language might hurt things," she said.

Well, she was right. I don't like Bump language much. I was still frustrated though. Sheila made me feel better by saying that if she had to go meet Jones I would come with her whether I liked it or not.

Alex & Allie & the Blondys came back in awhile, & Alex was really upset about something. He was saying Bump stuff really fast.

"Well?" Sheila asked Tammy.

"When we went to see Farmer Jones, he seemed real nice & he listened as Alex explained his Benevolent Bunny Pillow Bump Plan."

"Benilevil what?" I asked.

"Hush, beagle!" Sheila ordered.

Tammy talked again. "Anyway, he listened & then, when Alex stopped talking, he started talking a language I never heard before. At first it sounded like Bump, but what it was really like was 'Pumb! Pumb! Pumb!'"

"It was the Evil Bump language, Sheila!" yelled Allie, who looked upset too.

"The evil what?" I asked. I had a feeling it was weirdness time.

"Pumb language is the evil opposite of Bump language," said Allie.

"When Alex heard it, he got real upset & sat down to suck his toe," said Tammy.

"Bump Bump-Bump! Bump! Bump! Bump! Bump-Bump!" said Alex loudly & sadly. He had sat down to suck his toe again.

"He said Farmer Jones is a bad guy or he knows bad guys because Pumb language is very bad," said Allie.

Betsy had been listening to all this. She went up to Alex & said he could lie down on her for awhile.

Sargent Lisa went up to Sheila & said, "Gweneral swer, I would like to infworm you thwat mwy twoops are ready to stworm the pwalace, swo to spweak."

Sheila didn't look like she was listening, but she was cuz she said, "Stand

ready, Sargent. I am going to confront Jones myself."

"And I am coming with you," whispered Betsy, jumping up from under Alex's head.

"No, Betsy. I think it is time I confronted Jones alone. Come on, beagle," said Sheila, & off she hopped through the bunny pillow fields. I didn't know whether to be complimented or insulted. Ah well, a story is a story.

It was strange walking through the bunny pillow fields. Bunny pillows grow above ground, like pumpkins, & they have roots. It was like passing through hundreds of little Betsys. That thought scared me a little.

The door to Jones's house was open so we went right in. Sheila led the way to Jones's study where Betsy had confronted him years ago. And there he was.

The thing I noticed about Sheila at that moment was even though she is a lot shorter than Farmer Jones, it didn't really seem that way. Sheila is a big guy no matter how short she really is.

"Well, if it isn't the King & Mayer of Bags End, the famous Sheila R. Bunny, & her trusty lackey, Algernon Beagle. I am truly honored that you have graced my humble digs," said Jones in a mean sort of voice.

Sheila gave Jones a long glare & said, "I haven't come to fight, I have come to talk."

Jones bowed low & said, "Have a seat, my friends." So me & Sheila got on a couch & Jones settled himself in a chair facing us.

"What's a lackey?" I whisperasked Sheila.

"An assistant," Sheila said, "with a long nosebone, who hates food."

"Say, that sounds like me exactly!" I said.

Jones looked at us with a smile. Boy! I didn't like that smile at all!

"Well, what do you have to say, Your Highness?" said Jones.

Sheila was quiet for a minute. "Jones, my involvement in this matter has been indirect. Betsy comes up with some kind of cock-eyed scheme to free those pillows out there, she carries it out, & it fails. My knowledge of it comes from reading the beagle here's story in Bags End News. Because you have never harmed Betsy, I never felt a need to involve myself. I have enough other things to keep me busy."

"Like Bags End being illegal now?" Jones snickered. Even his snicker worried me.

Sheila grimaced, but nodded.

"So why are you here now?" asked Jones in a serious way, which was even scarier than his smiles or snickers.

Then he smiled & talked again. "I have a wonderful new torture for the next time she attacks my property."

Sheila glared at him. "I am here because of those Blondys you met earlier. But I am also here because Betsy is my friend & I think she has suffered enough. I want this to end."

Jones was quiet. He took a pipe out of his pocket & lit it. The smoke smelled horrible though it made me feel more relaxed for some reason. He offered the pipe to Sheila but she said she preferred her carrots. He offered it to me, but I said, "O! Yuk!" Just in case.

Then he talked. "You know, I really admire Betsy in a way. O, other pillows have escaped from me, but every business has some kind of property damage along the way. A few even made half-hearted attempts to do what she does. But their so-called freedom was more valuable to them than anything else. Betsy, though, Betsy never gives up. I sometimes imagine her plotting to defeat me 24 hours a day."

"You're not far off," I muttered.

Jones stood up. "Well, Your Majesty, if that is all, I have other things to attend to. Running a business is a full-time occupation, you know."

"Hey!" I yelled. "We're not done! Sheila has more to say!"

Jones bent down & looked me right in mah face. "My, but you are a boisterous little doggy, aren't you?"

I was brave & didn't tremble. "Sheila, what does boystrous mean?"

"It means being heard when you should only be seen," she said.

Jones looked at Sheila. "Well, Your Royalness? Your lackey says you have more to say?"

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 King: Sheila Bunny
 Written Down By: Lori Bunny

The Amachurz' Guide to Bagzend! (Part 1.

I got anothr lettr frum mah
 old pal Rich Amerikus the othr
 day. I brawt it too may litel
 royel budy Shlela in her Thron. room
 too hav her reed it too me.

She red, Deer Algernon,
 It seemz that evryweer I go
 theez days, peepel ask me about
 Bagzend. Somtims I no the anser
 an somtims I dont. I fineltee
 desided too ask ya if ya cood
 anser a serys ut kwestyuns
 I hav cam up with. I wood
 lik too print the anser in
 the "nekst issu ut Galleons
Lap. Thanks 4r yor help, budy.
 Yor Pal, Rich Amerikus.

Something happened then that I still don't really understand. Sheila's purple eyes, which are magical, glowed & she hopped up to near Jones's face & stayed there.

"This is what I have to say. You should have been happy that I wasn't involved before, because you were safe. I am not Betsy. I am far more dangerous. We will meet again, Jones. And next time, we will talk less."

Then Sheila hopped back down & I saw her purple eyes were back to normal. She hopped out the door before Jones could react.

I looked at his face & for a moment he looked scared. Then he saw I was still there & he smiled that mean smile & started to laugh. I ran away as fast as mah short legs could carry me, but I knew that his laugh wasn't nearly as mean as usual. Sheila had scared him.

I caught up with Sheila & we went back to the other guys in silence.

Betsy came bouncing up to us, whisperlyelling, "Well? What happened? Is he gonna give up?"

"It's time to go home," said Sheila.

Betsy got real mad & I didn't know what would happen next. What happened was Sheila & Betsy went off for a minute & there was all sorts of yelling. Then they came back & I saw Betsy was quiet. She went over to her Allies & told them to get moving. When she saw the rest of us just standing there, she whisperlyelled, "That goes for all of you too!"

Sheila wouldn't tell me what she said to Betsy. When we were sitting in her Throne Room a day later, she really didn't want to talk about it at all.

When I wouldn't stop asking questions, she even turned real loud the Miles Davis record on her little record player.

You never know what will happen next in Bags End.

The Amateur's Guide to Bags End!

Not long after, I got another letter from mah pal Rich Americus, & brung it to my little royal buddy Sheila's Throne Room to have her read it to me.

She read:

Dear Algernon,

It seems like everywhere I go these days, people ask me about Bags End. Sometimes I know the answer, & sometimes I don't. I finally decided to ask you if you could answer a series of questions I have come up with. I would like to print the answers in the next issue of Galleons Lap, & you could print them in Bags End News too, if you wanted to. Thanks for your help, buddy.

Your pal,
Rich Americus

Sheila then read the questions to me. There are 10 of them in all. I have tried to answer them best I can.

Question 1 - What would happen if you fell off the side of Bags End?

Answer - I had to go see Leo the Dark Man to get an answer to this one. He is also the Janitor of Bags End, & his main job is to scrape Miss Chris's bubble gum off the side of Bags End.

I found him on his comic book break, & he didn't want to talk to me. Sheila was with me, though, & so he put down his latest issue of Action Man Comics & invited me & Sheila to sit on his platform with him that hangs on the side of Bags End.

Leo thought real hard about that question. His dark forehead got all wrinkly like it does when he thinks hard. Leo looks like a shadow except that he isn't flat against a wall. He's more like a regular person in shape.

"Sometimes when I am cleaning, I look down & see strange things. Sometimes just

bright lights or swirling colors. Sometimes I think I even see people. Mostly, its just black. I don't know what would happen if I fell down there."

I looked at Sheila & saw she had a funny look on her face. Then I realized it was her "exploring more of Bags End" look.

"Sheila, are we gonna go over the edge of Bags End some day?" I asked fearfully.

"Sooner than you think, beagle," Sheila said with a strange smile.

Question 2 - Does Betsy Bunny Pillow have a face &, if she doesn't, how does she see & talk?

Answer - Boy! I really didn't like this question. Betsy is not a fella I really want to ask questions to. Also, she is still grumpy about the way Sheila dealt with Farmer Jones. So I begged Sheila to come with me again. She said OK cuz I think she was curious too.

We found Betsy in Miss Chris's TV room in her house in Connecticut, taking a nap with Miss Chris. She looked like she was in a good mood when Sheila waked up Miss Chris to wake up Betsy.

So I asked her the question. She got real mad & called me a spy & Miss Chris had to hold her back from smothering me.

"Relax, pillow, he's just a stupid little beagle," said Sheila.

"Yah, I am just a stupid little--hey! Sheila! That's not nice!" I said. "O! Mah feelings bone!" I whimpered, hoping Miss Chris would pick me up too. She did.

Betsy calmed down & whispered, "I don't know how I see. I just do. Who can say how such things work?"

"Besides, who really cares?" added Sheila, who was also in Miss Chris's arms. Then we all sorta took a nap together.

Not much of an answer. Sorry.

Question 3 - Is Bump language real or does Alexander just pretend it is to torture Algernon?

Answer - I can answer that question pretty quickly, fella. Bump language is real enough to bug me plenty. But Sheila told me to be fair & ask Alex about it. So I did, fearing the worst.

Alex looked at me & said, "Bump?" in the way that drives me crazy.

Allie said, "Alexander doesn't understand the question. He asks do you mean is Bump real in that it has all the flaws of English? Or do you mean does Bump drive you crazy because you will not accept it as better than English, soon to replace it when rational & sensitive people everywhere come to their senses?"

Well, I screamed & ranned away at that point, so that's all the answer you get to that one.

Question 4 - How come nobody in Bags End hardly ever has a birthday or gets older?

Answer - I asked Sheila about that one. She slouched down in her throne, crunching a carrot (O! Yuk!), & stared up at the ceiling with 1 purple eye shut, like she always does when she's thinking.

Finally, she talked. "That's not an easy question, Algernon. Bags End is a fantasyland, first of all. That means its rules are different from places like Connecticut. Second, people don't really like their heroes to grow up. All the Bags End friends will get old slowly. Miss Chris & Ramie live in Connecticut, so they will get old in the regular way. But when they come to Bags End, they can be the age they want to be. I like it this way." Then she took a little nap, & that was that.

Question 5 - Who came first, Miss Chris or Sheila?

Answer - Some of these questions are hard, & nobody would help me with this one. Sheila says Bags End wouldn't be much fun without a few unanswered questions.

I can tell you the theories I know, though.

The first is that Sheila & Pat & Pete & Lori were living in the woods like

regular rabbits when Princess Crissy brung them to Bags End. Or maybe Godd did. Nobody will tell me anything.

The other theory is that Miss Chris & Ramie made Bags End out of paper bags at first until Misses Mommy got some laundry bags from the thrift shop. Then they put Bags End as a fantasyland together in their imaginations.

Of course, the thing is that we keep finding stuff in Bags End that makes us think that Bags End existed in another form in England a hundred years ago.

I really don't know & I don't think anyone else is really positive. I guess the mystery remains.

Question 6 - I thought only Godd made people alive. How come, in Bags End, friends are made alive by Princess Ozma's Magic Powder of Life?

Answer - I had to ask Sheila, Princess Crissy, Ozma, & even Godd about this one, & you know what? Their answers don't even agree sometimes! But I came up with an answer that is what these guys do agree on.

Godd told me that Imagination is sort of like Godd's grandchild because Godd makes the person & that person uses his Imagination to create things.

Sheila told me that since Bags End is kind of on the border between Reality & Fantasy that the Bags End guys are made up of both. That explains how Ramie can buy us in toy stores in Connecticut & make us alive using a fantasy thing like the Powder of Life.

Crissy said that this was the reason why Bags End guys can stay in real places like Connecticut or fantasylands like Imagianna longer than people who live in fantasylands or real places.

Finally, Ozma said that the Powder of Life only works on inanimate objects. Then she explained that means toys & stuff.

How's that for research?

Question 7 - How do you get to Bags End? Does Sheila allow visitors?

Answer - Sheila doesn't really want visitors cuz she says she has enough trouble on her paws as it is. So I can't tell you how to get to Miss Chris's house or anything like that.

However, if you really want to come, you have two things going for you. First, you know Miss Chris lives in Connecticut. Second, since Bags End became illegal, it is no longer protected from visitors. So maybe you can get in that way. That goes for Oz & Narnia & Wonderland & the River & places like that too!

Question 8 - Was Ramie ever a baby? Or was he built as a toy?

Answer - This is another one of those questions where I get the Bags End-needs-a-little-mystery answer. Miss Chris & Sheila talk about buying Ramie for 2 pennies at a toy tall boy store. But Ramie tells stories about when he was a little boy on a farm in a place called Portland, & how he played football in a place called Bloomfield. Who can tell? Not me, that's for sure.

Question 9 - If Bags End looks like these laundry bags on the outside, 3 of them, what would happen if someone took 1 of the bags & shook it? What if you hid the Bag? Would everybody in that Bag be cut off from the rest? And how come you can see all of Bags End from the outside, but nobody can seem to get to the top or the bottom of the inside?

Answer - I feel like I am taking a test! I went to Sheila with all of these question & she told me what was what.

The 3 Bags of Bags End sit on top of each other on this little chair in the corner of Miss Chris's bedroom. They have to be piled like that, with the zippers closed, for the fantasyland to work. It's fantasy, you see, so you have to imagine what's going on inside, unless of course you are inside.

So if some mean fella came along & shook a Bag, or hid it, or whatever, it would

be the same as when the Bags are opened. That means that there would be just us bunch of guys all squished together inside. Miss Chris wouldn't let that happen though.

Now if the Bags are piled on top of each other, & the zippers are closed, then the fantasyland begins or works or whatever. Because it's a fantasyland, now it can have things like a top & bottom that nobody has been to, & doorways to other places.

Get it, fella? Use your imagination!

Question 10 - What kind of food does Algernon like, anyway?

Answer - I won't tell! Never! I will tell when I first ate it though. When I was a baby beagle, my Mommy Beagle gave it to me. She said, "Come on, Sonnyboy, eat a little something for your old mommy."

So when I eat my special food, I think of mah poor old long lost Mommy Beagle. O! Mah sad Mommy bone!

People ask hard questions about Bags End. This was a lot harder a story than one about Betsy attacking Farmer Jones or something like that.

The Making of Bags End News!

Mah fellow journalistic chum Rich Americus told me that people sometimes ask him how Bags End News is made. He wrote me a letter asking me if I would be willing to answer this as a sort of Question 11 to mah "Amateur's Guide to Bags End." Sure, why not?

The first thing I should say is that your old editor pal Algernon does all the reporting & my friend Lori Bunny writes it all down. Lori doesn't usually come with me to get the news.

When the stories happen in Bags End, we sit in the Bunny Family's living room to write the newspaper. Usually we do it while Margie is watching Bugs Bunny cartoons.

Lori helps me not just cuz she likes me but also cuz she is interested in making a newspaper too. She is real smart & likes to read hard books like encyclopedias. But she says helping me keeps her paws on the ground when she could easily float away into the ethereal & rarified air of Madame Knowledge. Whatever that stuff means.

Now when the stories happen on the road somewhere, like the one recently at the Bunny Pillow Farm, I have this magic thing called a Letter Bubble to use. What I do is write the story on a piece of paper & stick it in the Letter Bubble & the Bubble goes floating off to Lori.

Since I can't write words too good, I have to draw pictures & stuff too. Sometimes I get Sheila or Miss Chris to help me with all this.

I also have a pretty good memory for stories, so that helps me. And if I am not sure, I will ask Sheila or Betsy or other people involved in the story to help me remember it. Even big guys like to get the facts right, especially if it's about them.

Finally, when me & Lori have got the newspaper ready to go, I bring it to Sheila for her to give it her stomp of approval. Sheila mainly wants to make sure that I get what she said & did right. She tells me she doesn't trust the press.

I like writing the newspaper though I want to keep getting better. I like how my chum Rich Americus writes about all sorts of characters & lands in Galleons Lap. I like just writing about Bags End, but I hope to be as good a writer as he is someday.

Sheila tells me, "Just keep trying, beagle. You never know."



* * * * *



Martina Newberry

Details

After the affair he was not aware of,
and after he took a job up north thinking
she would follow, her friends watched her
take terrible risks in order to pinch herself
back into real life.

New lovers, new liabilities, new loneliness
scattered over the sands accumulating
on the floor of the TV room,
where she watched sci-fi movies
and ate microwave popcorn.

When she visited him to see
what was what, he asked her
for a divorce. She agreed.
Her arms and face had been free
of bruises for three months.

His anger had spent itself elsewhere.
Her fugitive sense of love and pain
hovered briefly, then disappeared.
She agreed, and gave him one turgid case
of the flu with the signed paperwork.

In some twisty, peculiar gesture
of politeness, he thanked her.
She became a disciple of
every kind of madness, learned
how to measure loneliness.

She told the story oh-so-many times,
realizing that none of the details really mattered.
She told the story one hundred different ways,
because they were all true, and the
wretched details didn't matter even a little.

* * *

The Littoral Zone

Sand grasses, each blade its own chieftain,
fog winding around their tops.
It's a kind of enchantment, you see that?
The air is drunk with salt moisture and
passes out on the sand right in front of us.
I'm afraid to look out at the water—
it's too endless, too unforgiving.
It accepts my regrets but offers no absolution
(which is the hard part).
The sun's crimson looks too much like anger
to suit me, and the wind mimics
the groaning of the gulls. Sitting on this blanket,
it is easy to expect comfort from the tides.
Comfort doesn't come though.
My thought is that we are not increased
by the hugeness out there—not at all.
The surf booms and booms again.
It reminds us that *vast* is not the answer
to composure or conciliation.

* * * * *





Homeless in Hawaii

[Travel Essay]

An interminable day of air traveling. Up too early. Never to bed.

Airports are scrutinized and militarized. It's like checking into a concentration camp. You are a bar code inspected from every angle. "May I have your attention please?" barks a surround sound PA system. "For your own security, thousands of watts of five different radiations are probing you for dangerous items and unauthorized cash. Everything you say or think is being recorded. This can and will be held against you. Attempt nothing. Thank you for your co-operation."

Start

I'm standing with Terry in line next to this really short hillbilly. He says he's 78 and on his honeymoon. He points out his new bride who is slumped over the luggage. All I can see is this mass of white hair all poofed up and ratted into a sphere, the likes of which was acceptable to Barbara Bush.

The lady looks like Barbara. What rule is it, I wonder, that old ladies have to rat their hair into these Victorian bubbles of white powder and spray? It's an announcement that they are shriveled, used up, dried, died, and resting on their unworkable moral creed which makes them disapprove of everything, despise everything. Their attitude is similar to a judgmental 13-year-old teenage girl—nothing is ever right.

Bridezilla is sick. She ate something festooned with bacteria that Shorty paid gigantically for—clams shipped too far, snails not shown enough heat, or salad that a migrant worker wiped his ass with as he picked it.

Bridezilla has been vomiting and racked in fever for the past twelve hours as Shorty dragged her through four airports and 10,000 miles in the last 14 hours. I do feel sorry for her, her vacation, her honeymoon, her visions of being a 13-year-old princess—all slammed into an airplane barf bag.

We are waiting in an office without walls for our rental cars. It is 10:30 at night. We confirm that we each started out at 5 that morning and have been stuffed cattle in the chute ever since. There is one Hawaiian serving our irritable mob that has gotten off the last airplane, about 30 of us. The desk clerk is in *no* hurry. The service is great, but with an additional 20 minutes of gossip and talk about the weather back East, each client takes about 45 minutes to get their car.

I'm last in line. Calculating the people in front, we'll get our car around midnight. Warm breezes waft in and out of the building, scented with the aroma of some obscure flower. Puffy clouds play around a waxing moon. Strange and delightful birdcalls come out of the dark from somewhere. I feel irritated to have been crushed with humanity at 50,000 feet all day, but the atmosphere outside is heavenly. I can hardly wait to nap under a palm tree, the sea talking in the distance, the gooney birds raiding my pack as I snore.

But I am not in as much of a hurry as these other people. I venture to converse with Shorty.

"You go ahead, Sir. You have to get the bride to the honeymoon suite."

"Ahhha thanks, surrr. Ahh cint believe haw long this line is."

"You do have a hotel room waiting for you, don't you?"

"Yeahhha. But bahaa the time we gits dare, dare won't be no night left."

"Hope yer lady feels better soon."

"Awww, she's alright. She's a trooper. We went parasailing last week." I can hardly imagine this. This near centurion with a 300-dollar bouffant. She looks tighter than a rusted-out engine block.

"How did you two meet?"

"Met at de ol' folks home. I had my pick of four widows, but this one was the most adventurous."

"A ten-thousand-mile belly ache on airplanes surely qualifies as adventure," I say, even though I don't mean it. Not even a ½-machete rating. A 3-machete rating would be if you were lost in a Guatemalan city without money. Five would be lost in the jungle with stolen temple treasure and a band of Mayans hunting you. "What happened to the babes you left behind?"

"I'm a young man, ya know. Just turned 79 and ready to party. She's 83. The other old ladies are just going to wait around to die. Can't marry them all."

"But you'd probably like to—?"

We chuckle over this for a while, the line imperceptibly moving forward.

Now it's midnight. Now Hawaii sleeps. Been sleeping since 4:30 like a small town in Iowa. The locals have a name for this "*Pou Hanna*"—done work. Basically: "Fuck it until tomorrow." But the police are working. They are pulling over any one who moves, harassing them "just in case." I gotta get off the road or be one of their "cases." I pull into the harbor where a large parking lot abuts the tinkling of boats in their mooring. I figure: sleep a little here till light, walk the beach, inhale sea air. It's all good.

But there is much traffic of swirling drunken Hawaiians partying and whooping all around. How long before they drag us out of our mini-van and pound us for our pale and paranoid pallor? This is sketchy to the max. Can't sleep out of the car. Can't sleep in the car, as I'm wired tighter than a cable crossing. It's only a matter of time before they notice us and make us the explorers in the stew pot as they dance around with bones in their noses.

I'm fucking paranoid. Sweaty. Sticky. Dirty. Distressed. Brain-fried. Terry has an angelic look on her face. She is sniffing the flower scent in the air. Clueless of the murderers lurking outside. I drive.

Take back roads up the hill into suburbia and park on a nondescript street. Mercury vapor light is stabbing me in the eyes. Terry crawls in the back seat and is snoring in three minutes. I am a bold-ass insomniac—bug-eyed awake. I need to be beaten to a pulp by the drunks to get some rest. I want to kill Terry for sleeping so easily.

Four hours later, my eyes are crimson bloodshot, a small rind of foam around my mouth. No sleep have I seen. I get out and pee in the street. A hint of light is behind the mountain. I drive down to a state park along the highway.

The park is still two miles down a ratty dirt road, but it is blocked off by a gate. The Hawaiians love to lock out the roads at sundown and open them at sunrise. You are either locked out or locked in. If in, then you have to buy a \$20 permit. More, if the "Park Official" needs beer money. As I rest in the twelve-way reclining seat, the sky lightens to reveal a vast field of dark and mysterious lava.

Rose-colored rays of long beam sun slice the air from the east, climbing over the 3000-foot pass between the volcanoes. The volcanoes are black against the sunrise. Although not awake, I am energized and excited. I roust Terry from her deep slumber, the sleep that should have been mine, and we trundle out on to the lava sea. Mostly rosey lava here, jet-black in swirls and cow-pie formations, bulbous bubbles bugging out all around. It is beautiful. Raw. New. Amazing.

As the day progresses, we find the most expensive grocery store in the United States. We get buried in rainbows. Steal avocados from trees along the road. Find Spencer Park where we snooze under a palm tree.

Homeless in Hawaii

Driving from the coast up the side of the volcano to the town of Waimea, we pick up a hitchhiker.

She is a hippy of sorts, in jumbled mismatched clothes, smelling faintly of pachouli oil and sweat. The first few words out of her mouth define her as a chicken-head.

“Gee, a ride . . . driving up the hill.”

Yes. This is a ride. Yes. We are actually driving uphill. If she has ever been in car before, possibly she doesn’t remember. We ask her a few polite questions. She’s not sure where she came from, but seems to know she’s going to Waimea. As we enter the cloud zone with it’s sparkling drizzle, she launches into a Hawaiian song.

“Eewaaaauuhko nuuui nuuui hawooole nononmii eewaaaa.”

Holy crap! Who stepped on the cat?

“Oh. Thank you. Thank you. What does the song mean?”

“It is the song to stop the rain.”

“Why do you want to stop the rain?”

“Eewoooo waaanamuee nuuui . . .”

“OK. OK. Please let it rain.”

A little crestfallen, she stops. As we enter town, there is an abandoned building with an ajar sign that reads “Art Center.”

“This is where I stay. They let me stay here. A little dirty, but I gonna clean up.”

Who is “they,” I wonder. I can envision this madwoman nesting in a corner with a ream of crappy palm tree paintings, shuffling amid the debris of hardened paint brushes and shredded paper.

Her form is still elegant, somewhere in her forties, and little mannerisms of grace give away a past life raised among the elite. How can she survive? Obviously too crazy to screw her way for a meal. Some family member must secretly stuff her purse with hundred dollar bills while she sleeps under a bridge. She awakes and thanks the goddess Peele for the manna. It is likely she has a GPS tracking chip in her neck, so the Nestlé family can locate her from satellite, not exactly caring for her, but not abandoning a niece of the Royal Family. They don’t want her to die, but they also don’t want her showing up for dinner at the mansion either. Let her roam in delusion, they calculate.

With every passing day, I cannot help but become more and more envious of the insane. Free food, Free clothes on their backs. Luxury accommodations all paid for (should they want them). A cornucopia of drugs. Friends by the thousands, both other loon jobs and an army of do-gooder housewife types, following a hoard of bureaucrats that console and cajole them.

I am but a street hood who put down the 9-millimeter and picked up the books. Twenty years of struggle on the straight got me an engineering degree—with which, and \$4, I can buy a low-fat latte at Starbucks. All my struggles for more smarts have left me starving and abandoned. Horatio Alger was a liar.

Cell Phone

Upon the beach sits the white man, clad in his red-white-and-blue swim shorts. He is skinny and as pale as a page of paper. “Straight off the plane,” they say of his sort here. “Howlie,” for short—meaning stupid white man. He’ll be fried red in an hour.

Beside him is a tiny two-year-old. The child is rooting in the soft coral sand, frequently looking to Dad for approval of its constructions. But Dad is somewhere else. In the now ubiquitous posture, chin on his chest, hunched over, his face inches from a tiny black box. He is studying a cell phone.

He works the invisible buttons with his thumb, absorbed in a cyber world that is not here. A world of appointments and concerns and pseudo-wonders of information. The child dribbles wet sand on Dad’s leg, but he does not notice. Here, the warm humid sea breeze washes his suddenly unclothed body, palm trees sway all around, goofy gooney birds squawk an uncognated language, and his impressionable child longs for his attention.



Courtesy of Charlie Beyer

Here, 10,000 miles from his suburban home, he misses his chance to connect with his offspring, to make meaning of his life and the kid's, to play in the sand, so simple, so sweet. He's buried in his cell phone. Unreachable by life.

Whether they know why or not, native Hawaiians hate the Howlie, the white-skinned devil that stole their land, who put them in clothes, led them in delusion to the imaginary Howlie God who would save them. But instead of salvation, God gave them decimation from pestilence. They got employed as slave labor for the sugar corporations. They got destruction of their bodies with the food of the foreigners.

Hawaiians had previously been the healthiest people on earth. The Church said they must eat white flour, white sugar, white fat and grease—in everything. Everything white. Now their bodies are ballooned and sickly. Now they hunt the Howlie after the sun goes down, in some reverse psychology of entitlement/revenge. The entitled white skins are safely in their hotels, but the few Howlies still wandering unaware after dark are the focus of the Hawaiian rage—beating and robbing, and beating again for good measure. But now a new design of the devil has arrived to pacify them. The cell-phone.

No more do they scowl at the passing white devil. Now they stare into tiny screens of the billion things in the world, the texting, the sexting, the next thing. Their angst is pacified by the tiny machine without a soul. A machine that comes with a 100-dollar bill each month, with a thousand apps to unnecessarily define the world. Why bother being ugly with the stink eye when you can watch the horribleness Howlies do to each other on the tiny screen? Why bother to beat the Howlie with your fists, when you can watch them be raped in the palm of your hand? The Hawaiian anger is diffused in a kaleidoscope of irrelevant information.

The Race

They have the Triathlon race here on the west side of the island. A testosterone-extravaganza of endurance and sport product promotion. Everywhere are spandex-clad hard bodies with glowing icons on them for Nike, Adidas, and Big Dog.

But as I drive on the east side, the wet side, I see lesser sports-driven-men and -women. Still they wear the designer gear, but labor to drive their bikes at 2 MPH up a two-degree slope. These are lightweights not practicing at 50 MPH on the track of the dry side, but are sweating profusely in the humidity, puffing along back roads, unseen through the verdant foliage. Unsung.

These are not the iron men—they are the marshmallow men. Instead of running 20 miles in the hot sun, they will stroll down to town for a caffeine-free vanilla latte. Instead of pedaling madly for 50 miles, they may coast a half a dozen miles and get a ride back up in a truck bed. Instead of swimming two miles like sharks are on their tails, a nice bubble bath in the evening might suffice, the victor with the nicest scent and most abundant froth.

Pololū Valley

It's a fine mud trail down. Be tough in the rain. But now, a steady stream of tourists takes up the 45-degree trail, from thickly wrapped Japanese to near-naked brunt fat-men. Old men, families, dogs, exuberant youth all launch over the edge and down the 1000 feet to the luxuriant valley floor. But no old ladies. These stay on top and worry when their men with the wallets will come back up.

The valley floor, yet another kind of paradise on this Hawaiian island. New to us. Black volcanic sand on the beach, pounding Pacific surf, and a canopy of pines seventy feet above us, with their wispy needles filtering the sun. The sea spray is mixed with the muggy hot humidity. This makes the air so thick you have to chew each gulp of gas three times before you can breathe it.

The camping is wonderfully free. No bureaucrat will venture the two-hour hike to dispense a \$20 ticket. But the camper must have the stones to pack it all down and pack it all back up. If one crosses the valley floor, another ridge confronts you, and another trail that sinews its way up and over to yet another hidden valley, wilder even than this one.

And beyond that, another hogback, another trail, the valleys becoming more and more mysterious, abandoned, wild. These are virgin valleys, saturated in aloha, rarely visited by a camper, if at all, isolated from all but the toughest boar hunters restlessly wandering the hills for days. These valleys are a treasure of wilderness on the most popular and iconic island in the world.

We choose to camp at night in Pololū Valley. Hiking down in the evening with only a few blankets. The last of the sun shimmers through the trees, flashing off wet rocks on the beach, the viscous sea air feeling recuperative in our chests. A few other campers, only a few, and politely spaced so that we cannot see each other. We find a nice place up in the trees, a view out over the ocean, the soft black sand under us, the canopy above, some odd birds laughing and chattering. The thick air inviting us to be naked and absorb the ether around us.

But then the sun blots out. The drizzle begins. Terry has brought one 10' x 12' roll of 2-mil plastic painter's drop cloth. Now what to do with that? I find a smooth horizontal log suspended five feet off the ground and toss it over. We use our shoelaces to tie little stones in the corners and tie these off to whatever is handy. A nice little tent is made that is keeping our bedding dry. Raining with an attitude now, the water runs like a faucet off the corners, but the sand drinks it faster than it can soak our humble recline.

This is all fine. It is warm. Yes . . . wet and warm, but warm.

But there is someone else camping with us. A horde of forty million mosquitoes. These little locals don't have TVs to go home to at night. In fact, they are completely nocturnal. Relentlessly they assault us, singing in our ears as another dozen puncture every part. They mob us. A slap killing twenty is the standard blow, but makes no impression in their numbers.

The dark is now thickly upon us, the rain a mist, the mosquitoes in their ideal environment with



Courtesy of Charlie Beyer

food for the night. All notion of a breeze stops to accommodate their feasting. At first it is troublesome, then damn annoying. By 2 it is cause for cursing, thrashing, and complaining miserably. At 4, it is still dark as the inside of a stone and the air is a frenzy of whining mosquitoes, each begging to sink its proboscis into us. Terry snores from time to time and I want to kill her, again, as a wink of sleep has not been mine. I pull the covers off her, hoping the hoard will feast on her flesh instead of mine, while I wrap myself like the mummy in the crappy wet cloth. But she groans, and I know she is getting decimated as I am, so relinquish a corner for her to cover . . . something.

The dawn at 5:30. I have dragged myself to the edge of a dune, hoping for a little wind, cross-eyed from the sleepless night, my skin swollen with venom. Both of us are covered in itchy bumps. The sun rises over the western ocean in all its beauty. The low tide surf plays differently with the beach. The mosquitoes vanish back to their daytime hiding. An exhausted and torpid peace lies in the tropical trees. One hell of a long night. An aloha of torture. But the first rays of sun bring peace back to the soul. We regain our shoelaces and hike back out to where some god-damned coffee is. Back to the dry side where centipedes and spiders are welcome bites compared to the madness of the midnight minions.

* * * * *



Colin James

A Suvivalist's Manifesto

1. In preparation, stretch.
Moderately at first,
then recklessly,
capitulating muscles and tendons
to their intergalactic limits.
2. Scream primevally,
in unadulterated rage,
standing on one foot,
while mincing with rehearsed cuteness.
3. Arrange some essentials
like popcorn and tellurium.
Jog in place for several hours
refusing, then daring, any gland to sweat.
4. Call out enthusiastically
to a neighbor, preferably
in another State,
while subconsciously adjusting
the stars-and-stripes bandanna
on your head. Begin writing.

* * *



Gardening After a Period of Denial

Flaunting her hibiscus,
she rid the bed
of stones and small rough.

Digging, her muscles grew taut
as leverage-aided thrust.

Nearby the moans of contented doves.

She carried water determinedly
up the steep grade of hill,
and flushed it over her garden,
holding the water can
till it shook in static tremors.

* * *

Standards of Indulgence

The ancient (by now) ceremony
of closing an envelope
with thick wax and signing it,
with your own distinctive seal,
reminds me of the time
I fell out of a tree.

I never saw it coming,
and had little time to prepare
for my nurse's beautiful eyes.

* * *

Tunnel of Teeth

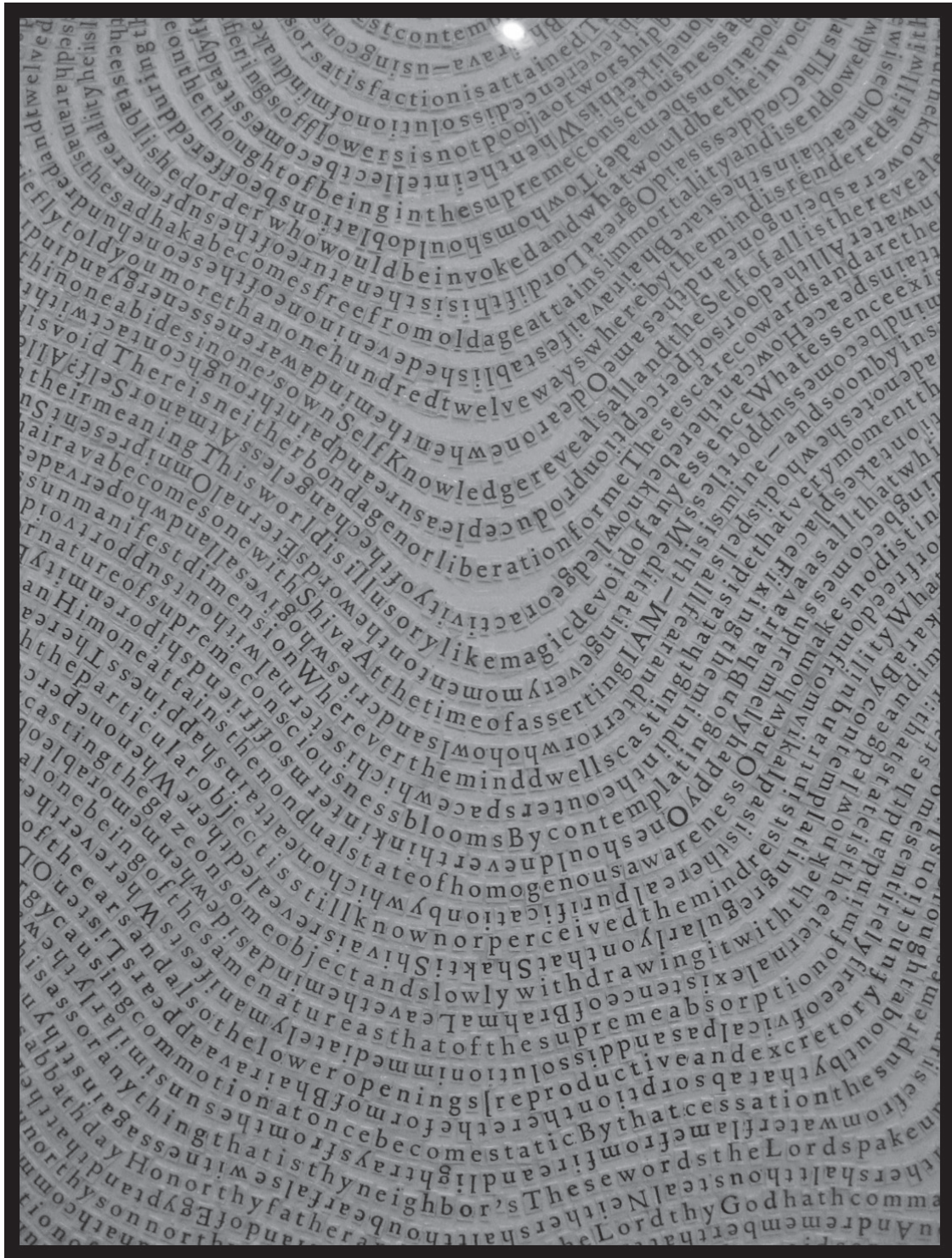
If there were more competition,
I'd be out of business,
but my hot dog stand
is doing well down here.

The people who pop in
on me are usually very hungry,
and ecstatic to find a vendor.

Invariably, they ask the way out.
But I'm a businessman,
and tell them I'm lost myself.

* * * * *





Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Notes from New England

[Commentary]

*“Please accept this ragged purse
of high notes.”*

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), then revived in issue 59 (October 2006) as Notes from the Northwest, & appearing since issue 75 (October 2010) under its original title. It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, and perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.

This World is Illusory Like Magic Devoid of Any Essence

A grand canvas of words, twisting & spinning, barking, humming, furry, heavy-leaved, warming me happy—

I wake. Cramped bus. Look out window. Nearly there. I sit in back next to a pretty girl I wish I could talk to. I feel old though a skinny age still, feel like a skeleton buried in a dead fire.

She reads in a handmade book of bark & leaves, looks like 'twas written with a branch dipped in dark old blood: *“Yesterday it came to me: the guilt, anguish, rage, that's driven me this far out—it's this life I've never fully controlled—”*

Stops, looks up, turns to me, her long red hair tied in a jumble of curls, her green eyes net mine before I can escape. “Your stop is next. Here's a book to take”—pause, smile—“& a kiss from someone you will meet one day”—her lips on my cheek like a soft rain lingering impossibly slow. I stagger off with my book bag & the book she handed me.

A soft of coffeehouse I go to often. Just a few tables in the vestibule in front of the cave-like entrance of the bookstore I have worked at on & off since I was about 12 & they caught me stealing a porno with panties-less cheerleaders on the cover. He said: *Keep the porno, but work it off here. Or cops.* Became my boss.

I worked behind the register for years before I was allowed to go up beyond the main floor of new & used books. To enter through the back door with a key I'd earned, old rusty steel, follow the long dim hallway to the first ramp up.

But I stay today in the vestibule. A rickety red metal table & chair. Set the girl's book down before me.

The next page seems far more for notes than a continuing narrative:

**** I visited old friends but their place was so cluttered & dirty I had to use their bathroom to clean up. But the sink's faucet wouldn't run & the tub was filled with old towels, half-sopping up some black muddy water. I came back out worse for trying & V is showing off her S&M artwork, girls chained to walls, to guns, to trees, to old convertibles, by thin golden chains affixed to their tongues, their nipples, their clits.*

**** I have a silver electric notebook with a clear pen I light by wick to use, but I'm homeless again & caught in the rain, & my notebook is getting wet, & I panic because I have no home, & I have no friends, & now this? I run.*

**** The last thing I did before leaving for good was to buy a cassette of an old album called Sco'utland by James McGunn. It's 90 minutes long, stories & songs & fragments, & I go to the public library to look him up but . . . nothing. Not even a review of his album. Nobody at that crazy bookstore knew.*

Wait. *What?* My bookstore? Maybe. I get up & push the knobless oak door in; sometimes gets stuck & you risk splinters trying.

There's a movie poster on it this time though. Looks like a spaceman far from home, sitting slumped on a planetoid next to a strange ship. A tugboat? Called *Alone*. "*How will Daniel get home?*" the poster asks.

Immediately inside is the store's map rack. Even on this first floor, book sections change location every day. The rack's empty though. It happens about this time in the afternoon. Then the maps need to be collected from where they've been left on shelves, displays, the floor. I've done that *many* times.

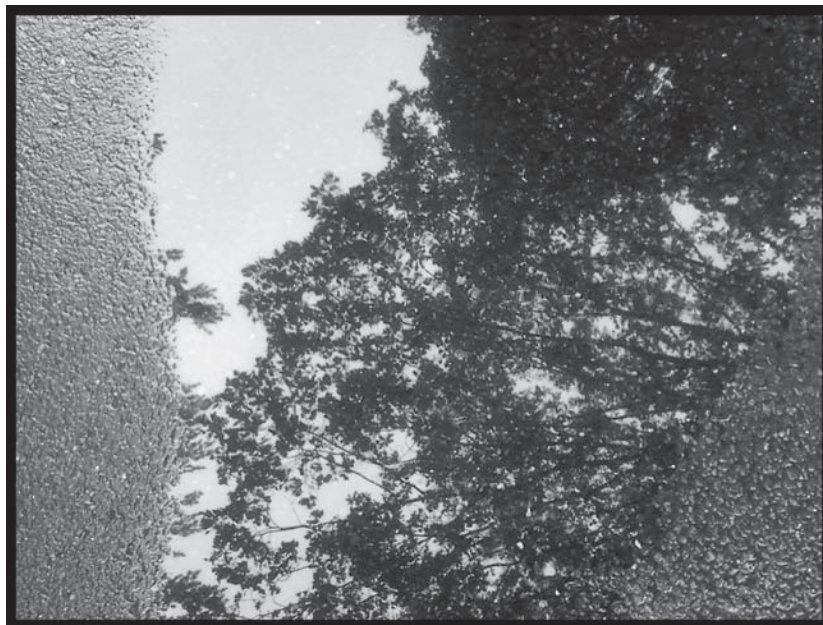
I know a corner that's always free. When I was about 14, one of the older girls, she had red hair & green eyes too, took me there. Kissed me on the cheek & said, "She will like you so much."

I open my book to the next page & it's back to longer narration:

My father & I went to an abandoned complex, where he said when he was young he would win track trophies, football crowns, baseball awards. "Ahh the girls," he whispers as he limps along beside me.

The Fountain in the middle has hardly moved, no matter the weeds filling the stream that once fed it. He drops back to pass, staggers, throws me a long one I make to catch like football-shaped air. I pitch him a fastball of air & he POW! drives it over that falling down grandstand where ghosts of girls lick lips knowing, or intending to know.

He nods, starts to drift away, stops suddenly, looks down at a puddle. I join him. Shaggy tree in puddle. He points down. "That's you." Looks up & around us, ruins, no tree. Touches his heart, "Me."



"You're here!" says the happy low voice above me. My old boss, Jester, about 80 years old, about 7 feet tall, crystal blue eyes, climbs mountains with pretty girls part his age, reads old poetry aloud in the clouds while they quietly masturbate.

Tries to hand me a book, *The Literary Book of Us*. "It has your answers!" But I show him I have a book. His smooth ugly face cringes. Books writ in blood spook him.

I nod. He reads, loudly, so everyone can hear him: *"Traveling a war-torn country with his dog, a beautiful robot, & every few miles the dog will sniff out a pipe of operational waste to empty. Takes an hour. She needs a good cleaning out after."* I nod, smile, hold up my book again, to remind, & he leaves me slowly.

Stand up, take my book & navigate mapless to the back door. My key rustily opens the door & I push inside. There's music as I walk through the tunnel. Bright guitars, pulsing organ & cello, & a man quiet's voice singing: *"Curse the day / I'm cursing / All the way & back again / into town to meet my maker / four feet tall, & full of sin / feeling like I'm noone's monster / I lift him up / get my revenge / now I'm free / but I feel no revelry."* Hugs me like a brother & evanescences.

The ramp is warm & very old, like fossilized wood; I'd left my shoes in one of the slots in the case reserved for shoes. House rules: barefoot.

Climb & climb, knowing I'll come to the floor I need. That's part of why the public isn't allowed up here—the panic of not knowing where you'll end up, nor when you'll return. *Everyone does return though.*

I climb & climb & finally arrive to a doorway & enter. No books in sight. It's a party. A room covered in portraits of pretty Creatures: crooked smiling Dalmatian; big brown-eyed little bear; a purple-spotted shiny-eyed leopard kitty; a little black & white pandy bear in a red & orange skirt; a brown & white beagle puppy; & a long-eared White Bunny. A big couch crowded with people who are listening to a red-haired faerie-dressed girl reading from a book that looks like mine!

More singing than reading:

People cut themselves to relieve the deeper psychic pain they feel with physical pain. I punish my body & waste my time. One pain relieves another.

Pauses. Green-eyed twinkle at me. Reads on.

I did that with booze & LSD. Replaced one with the other. At my best I replace waste with Art. It's a balance.

The crowd is pretty, dressed in tie-dye rags & long hair. Want the rest like they know it. In fact, I see them mouth along her final words.

Maybe I have 25 years, 30, 40, who knows, left, but I won't necessarily be better than I am now. That past & much of its people will keep diminishing.

I turn & leave, let the store know I have to move along. But now I know there are two books, & two girls had them. So maybe more girls, more books. For the moment, I climb the warm ancient ramp to the next level I'm given.

This one is books. Narrow aisles, floor-to-ceiling bookshelves, the floor half in shadows, half in candlelight. And the books are so tightly shelved that I can't randomly choose a volume. Just read that each volume titled the same thing: **Go Into the Green.**

I've walked some miles through these tightly packed shelves when I see daylight through a far door with a window. Hurry, look through, & my eyes seem to twist with the view I see of an alley. A brick wall half-folded upon itself, its two red doors bent back impossibly. The alley's dirt floor growling with fury or despair. A badly-sprained corrugated metal wall.



I pull back, & half-fall to the floor. My book is partly torn apart, its ribbons fraying, its bark crumbling. I open it up to read again, *hurry*.

We went down to the pond again, my older brothers & me. Not light yet, stumbling, but somehow made it. They wanted to photograph the lily pads again, using their ancient cameras on tripods, focusing under their black cloths. Opposite sides of pond. They waited, & waited, for the black jellyfish-like plants to drift by as they would. I was there for luck. I'd been with them the first time they'd found this pond, & these lilies & jellyfish-plants.

They were high school football players otherwise. And years later, they both ended up in motorized wheelchairs. Not from football, or a car accident. It was because they got sentimental & we three came back to the pond, & the jellyfish-plants were angry for the years' absence. Stunged & stinged. I ran, because I was a coward. I sent help, because I loved them.

A long way back to the entrance & I feel like one more floor to climb. Climb & climb but suddenly arrive, & standing in the doorway is the girl who had shown me the corner when I was 14. Dressed in what looks like a long single bloom from her red hair to her bare feet.

"Are you the others too? Are you all the same?"

Green eyes twinkling, she says, "If you can find me this time!" & she evanesces among the many rows of bookcases behind her. "Use the book!" her words linger in my ear.

In my hand, the clear pen that lights by a wick. I find matches in my pocket, & I light it. Page through my tattered book until I find a page with her words forming on it as I watch.

"Hurry!"

I write: "Give me a clue."

She writes: "Go into the Green."

I nod.

Carrying my disintegrating volume, I walk through the stacks, no longer really looking at them. This feels like something new, like arrival. I'm dressed in several ragged shirts, & I shed them all but one that says inside a crude circle: "*The Cycle is Complete.*" My jeans are ragged too; I tighten them with my old belt. Bend down & double-knot tie my worn black sneakers. Finger-comb my long tangled

hair, fingernail brush my beard. Move with intent.

My book *hmmms* when she writes again. “Look up!” I do & see as I hadn’t that this floor has sky not roof. She’s up there, smiling, waiting for me, her hand held toward me.

I close my eyes, let myself rise, forget I don’t know how to rise. A long sweet saxophone solo rises in my mind, helps me steer eyes-closed, until my hand feels another’s grip me, pull me closer.

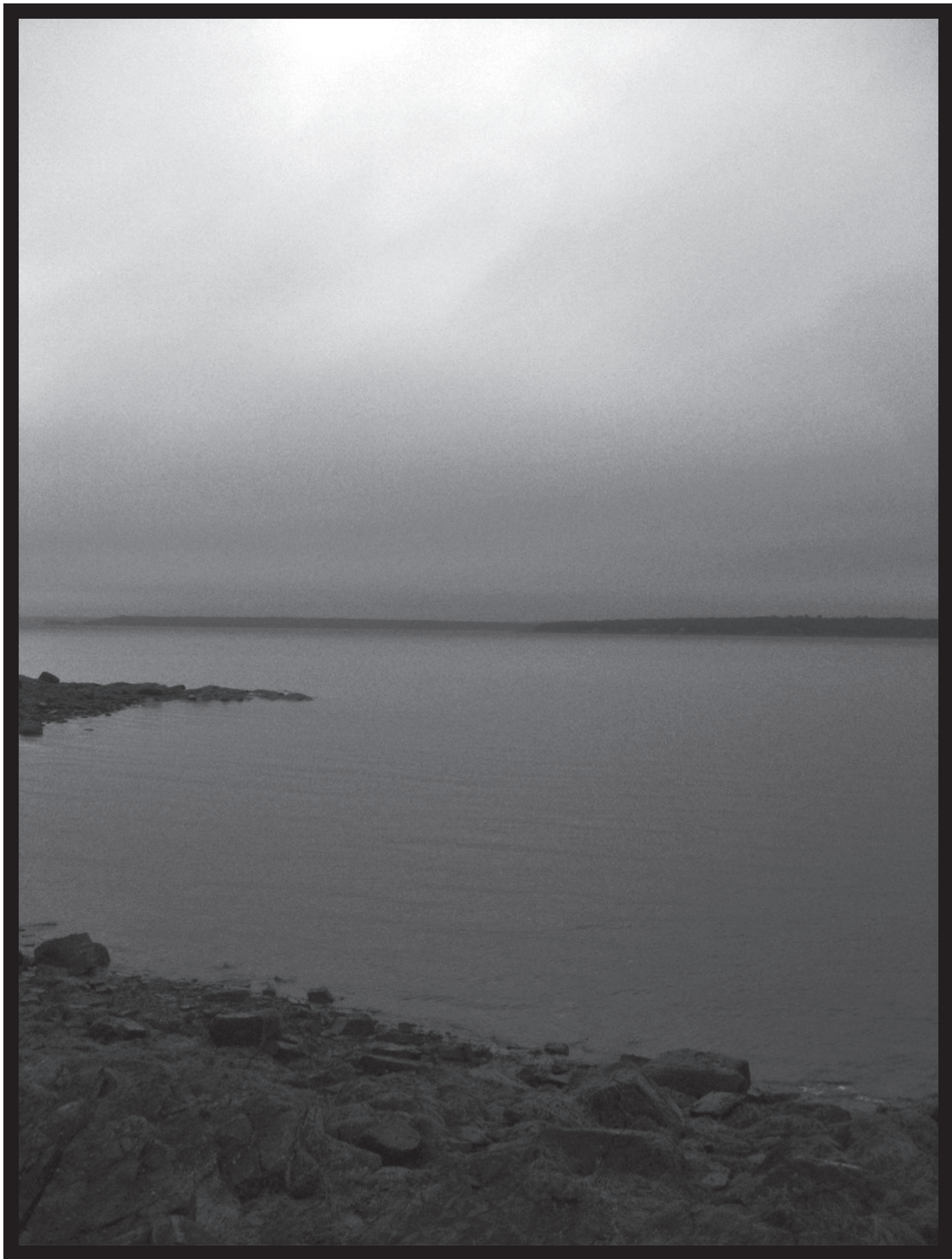
She doesn’t talk but our hands remain closely clasped, & she leads me into the sky, higher & higher, until we come to a doorway, as though the sky was the next ramp up. We arrive & are standing in a quiet room with many of my co-workers, including my old boss, & the several red-haired girls who have haunted my years.

Tis an old canvas on the wall, a painting signed by John Reid, a vast tree, big as a city, “Where all men & women will live in the future,” says my old boss. “Look deeper in,” he advises me, & I do, & it’s like I enter this future happy world, & stay, & stay, see more trees within this great one, & the glare of a sunrise through them, nudging my eyes to close, & to open again.

And when I wake up in the vestibule of the bookstore I have worked in all these years, my hand holds only a few crumbs of bark, & a scrap of paper written in a girl’s curlicue hand: “You’ll come again soon!”

10/27/2015





Walt Whitman



Crossing Brooklyn Ferry

[Classic Poetry]

1

FLOOD-TIDE below! I watch you face to face;
Clouds of the west! sun there half an hour high! I see you also face to face.

Crowds of men and women attired in the usual costumes! how curious you are to me!
On the ferry-boats, the hundreds and hundreds that cross, returning home, are more curious to me
than you suppose;
And you that shall cross from shore to shore years hence, are more to me, and more in my meditations,
than you might suppose.

2

The impalpable sustenance of me from all things, at all hours of the day;
The simple, compact, well-join'd scheme—myself disintegrated, every one disintegrated, yet part of
the scheme:
The similitudes of the past, and those of the future;
The glories strung like beads on my smallest sights and hearings—on the walk in the street,
and the passage over the river;
The current rushing so swiftly, and swimming with me far away;
The others that are to follow me, the ties between me and them;
The certainty of others—the life, love, sight, hearing of others.

Others will enter the gates of the ferry, and cross from shore to shore;
Others will watch the run of the flood-tide;
Others will see the shipping of Manhattan north and west, and the heights of Brooklyn to the south
and east;
Others will see the islands large and small;
Fifty years hence, others will see them as they cross, the sun half an hour high;
A hundred years hence, or ever so many hundred years hence, others will see them,
Will enjoy the sunset, the pouring in of the flood-tide, the falling back to the sea of the ebb-tide.

3

It avails not, neither time or place—distance avails not;
I am with you, you men and women of a generation, or ever so many generations hence;
I project myself—also I return—I am with you, and know how it is.

Just as you feel when you look on the river and sky, so I felt;
 Just as any of you is one of a living crowd, I was one of a crowd;
 Just as you are refresh'd by the gladness of the river and the bright flow, I was refresh'd;
 Just as you stand and lean on the rail, yet hurry with the swift current, I stood, yet was hurried;
 Just as you look on the numberless masts of ships, and the thick-stem'd pipes of steamboats, I look'd.
 I too many and many a time cross'd the river, the sun half an hour high;
 I watched the [Twelfth-month](#) sea-gulls—I saw them high in the air, floating with motionless wings,
 oscillating their bodies,
 I saw how the glistening yellow lit up parts of their bodies, and left the rest in strong shadow,
 I saw the slow-wheeling circles, and the gradual edging toward the south.

I too saw the reflection of the summer sky in the water,
 Had my eyes dazzled by the shimmering track of beams,
 Look'd at the fine centrifugal spokes of light around the shape of my head in the sun-lit water,
 Look'd on the haze on the hills southward and southwestward,
 Look'd on the vapor as it flew in fleeces tinged with violet,
 Look'd toward the lower bay to notice the arriving ships,
 Saw their approach, saw aboard those that were near me,
 Saw the white sails of schooners and sloops—
 saw the ships at anchor,
 The sailors at work in the rigging, or out astride the spars,
 The round masts, the swinging motion of the hulls, the slender serpentine pennants,
 The large and small steamers in motion, the pilots in their pilot-houses,
 The white wake left by the passage, the quick tremulous whirl of the wheels,
 The flags of all nations, the falling of them at sun-set,
 The scallop-edged waves in the twilight, the ladled cups, the frolicsome crests and glistening,
 The stretch afar growing dimmer and dimmer, the gray walls of the granite store-houses by the docks,
 On the river the shadowy group, the big steam-tug closely flank'd on each side by the barges—
 the hay-boat, the belated lighter,
 On the neighboring shore, the fires from the foundry chimneys burning high and glaringly
 into the night,
 Casting their flicker of black, contrasted with wild red and yellow light, over the tops of houses, and
 down into the clefts of streets.

4

These, and all else, were to me the same as they are to you;
 I project myself a moment to tell you—also I return.

I loved well those cities;
 I loved well the stately and rapid river;
 The men and women I saw were all near to me;
 Others the same—others who look back on me, because I look'd forward to them;
 (The time will come, though I stop here to-day and to-night.)

5

What is it, then, between us?
 What is the count of the scores or hundreds of years between us?
 Whatever it is, it avails not—distance avails not, and place avails not.

6

I too **lived**—Brooklyn, of ample hills, was mine;
 I too walk'd the streets of Manhattan Island, and bathed in the waters around it;
 I too felt the curious abrupt questionings stir within me,
 In the day, among crowds of people, sometimes they came upon me,
 In my walks home late at night, or as I lay in my bed, they came upon me.

I too had been struck from the float forever held in solution;
 I too had receiv'd identity by my Body;
 That I was, I knew was of my body—and what I should be, I knew I should be of my body.

7

It is not upon you alone the dark patches fall,
 The dark threw patches down upon me also;
 The best I had done seem'd to me blank and suspicious;
 My great thoughts, as I supposed them, were they not in reality meagre?
 would not people laugh at me?

It is not you alone who know what it is to be evil;
 I am he who knew what it was to be evil;
 I too knitted the old knot of contrariety,
 Blabb'd, blush'd, resented, lied, stole, grudg'd,
 Had guile, anger, lust, hot wishes I dared not speak,
 Was wayward, vain, greedy, shallow, sly, cowardly, malignant;
 The wolf, the snake, the hog, not wanting in me,
 The cheating look, the frivolous word, the adulterous wish, not wanting,
 Refusals, hates, postponements, meanness, laziness, none of these wanting.

8

But I was Manhattanese, friendly and **proud**!
 I was call'd by my nighest name by clear loud voices of young men as they saw me
 approaching or passing,
 Felt their arms on my neck as I stood, or the negligent leaning of their flesh against me as I sat,
 Saw many I loved in the street, or ferry-boat, or public assembly, yet never told them a word,
 Lived the same life with the rest, the same old laughing, gnawing, sleeping,
 Play'd the part that still looks back on the actor or actress,
 The same old role, the role that is what we make it, as great as we like,
 Or as small as we like, or both great and small.

9

Closer yet I approach you;
 What thought you have of me, I had as much of you—I laid in my stores in advance;
 I consider'd long and seriously of you before you were born.

Who was to know what should come home to me?
 Who knows but I am enjoying this?
 Who knows but I am as good as looking at you now, for all you cannot see me?

It is not you alone, nor I alone;
 Not a few races, nor a few generations, nor a few centuries;
 It is that each came, or comes, or shall come, from its due [emission](#),
 From the general centre of all, and forming a part of [all](#):
 Everything indicates—the smallest does, and the largest does;
 A necessary film envelopes all, and envelopes the Soul for a proper time.

10

Now I am curious what sight can ever be more stately and admirable to me than my
 mast-hemm'd Manhattan,
 My river and sun-set, and my scallop-edg'd waves of flood-tide,
 The sea-gulls oscillating their bodies, the hay-boat in the twilight, and the belated lighter;
 Curious what Gods can exceed these that clasp me by the hand, and with voices I love call me
 promptly and loudly by my nighest name as I approach;
 Curious what is more subtle than this which ties me to the woman or man that looks in my face,
 Which fuses me into you now, and pours my meaning into you.
 We understand, then, do we not?
 What I promis'd without mentioning it, have you not accepted?
 What the study could not teach—what the preaching could not accomplish, is accomplish'd, is it not?
 What the push of reading could not start, is started by me personally, is it not?

11

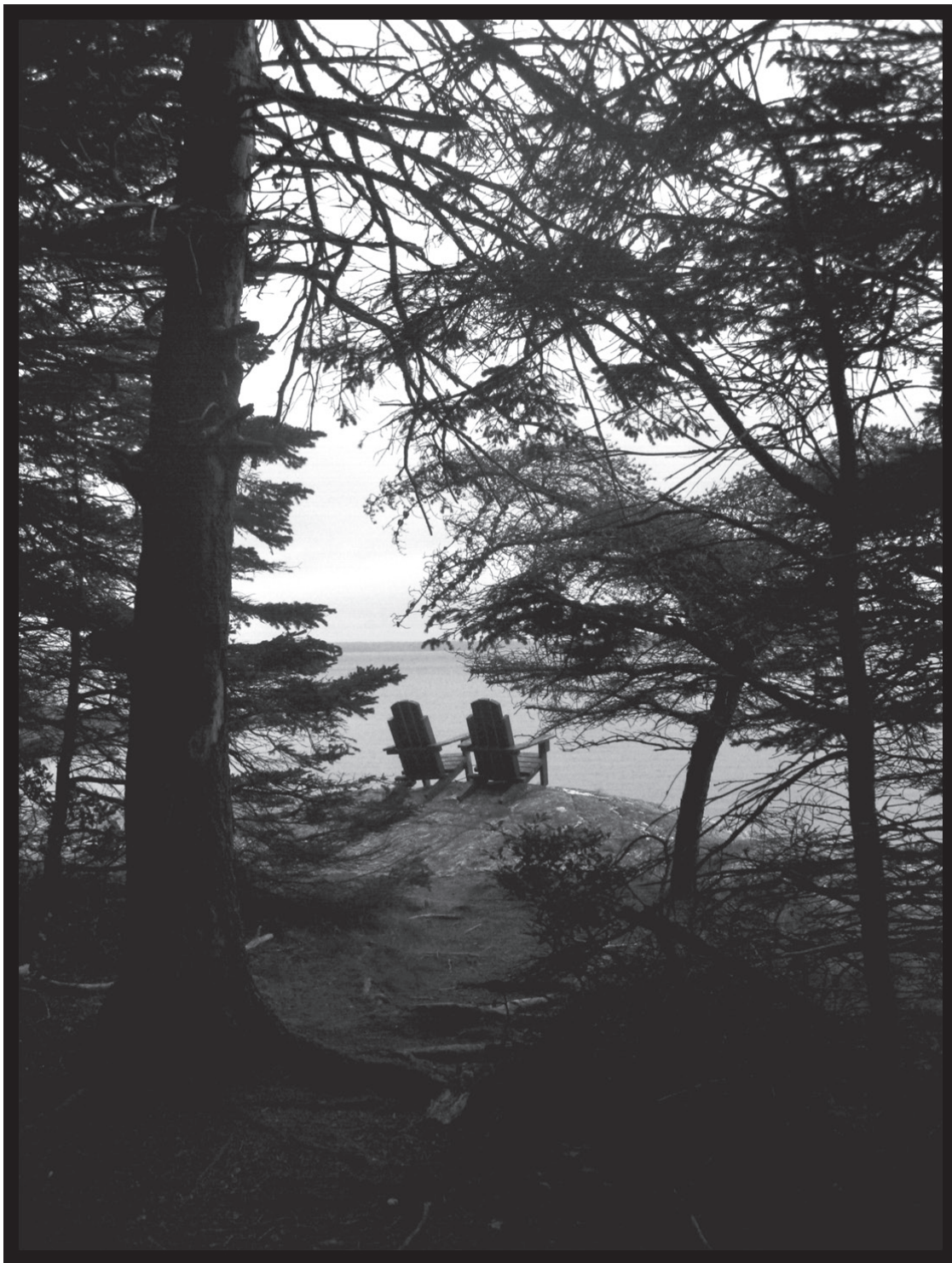
Flow on, river! flow with the flood-tide, and ebb with the ebb-tide!
 Frolic on, crested and scallop-edg'd waves!
 Gorgeous clouds of the sun-set! drench with your splendor me, or the men and women
 generations after me;
 Cross from shore to shore, countless crowds of passengers!
 Stand up, tall masts of Mannahatta!—stand up, beautiful hills of [Brooklyn](#)!
 Throb, baffled and curious brain! throw out questions and answers!
 Suspend here and everywhere, eternal float of [solution](#)!
 Gaze, loving and thirsting eyes, in the house, or street, or public assembly!
 Sound out, voices of young men! loudly and musically call me by my nighest name!
 Live, old life! play the part that looks back on the actor or actress!
 Play the old role, the role that is great or small, according as one makes it!

Consider, you who peruse me, whether I may not in unknown ways be looking upon you;
 Be firm, rail over the river, to support those who lean idly, yet haste with the hasting current;
 Fly on, sea-birds! fly sideways, or wheel in large circles high in the air;
 Receive the summer sky, you water! and faithfully hold it, till all downcast eyes have time
 to take it from you;
 Diverge, fine spokes of light, from the shape of my head, or any one's head, in the sun-lit water;
 Come on, ships from the lower bay! pass up or down, white-sail'd schooners, sloops, lighters!
 Flaunt away, flags of all nations! be duly lower'd at sunset;
 Burn high your fires, foundry chimneys! cast black shadows at nightfall! cast red and yellow light over
 the tops of the houses;
 Appearances, now or henceforth, indicate what you are;
 You necessary film, continue to envelop the soul;
 About my body for me, and your body for you, be hung our divinest aromas;
 Thrive, cities! bring your freight, bring your shows, ample and sufficient rivers;
 Expand, being than which none else is perhaps more spiritual;
 Keep your places, objects than which none else is more lasting.

12

We descend upon you and all things—we arrest you all;
 We realize the soul only by you, you faithful solids and fluids;
 Through you color, form, location, sublimity, ideality;
 Through you every proof, comparison, and all the suggestions and determinations of ourselves.
 You have waited, you always wait, you dumb, beautiful ministers! you novices!
 We receive you with free sense at last, and are insatiate henceforward;
 Not you any more shall be able to foil us, or withhold yourselves from us;
 We use you, and do not cast you aside—we plant you permanently within us;
 We fathom you not—we love you—there is perfection in you also;
 You furnish your parts toward eternity;
 Great or small, you furnish your parts toward the soul.

* * * * *



Tom Sheehan



Fahrenheit, Electricity, and a Flexible Flyer

[Fiction]

She is more than Fahrenheit, she is electric, not the lightning kind that will blast you hither and yon, but wired, the connections to all of me, my eyes bright and seeing the stars mirrored in the river, almost where they belong, bucket-spilled or tossed across the sky above Vinegar Hill, above all of Saugus—above old Scotts Mill directly across the street from my house, above the Iron Works from 1636 leaving figures and ideas larger than fossils on the land (like the 300-year-old remnant of the slag pile), above Rippon's Mushroom House where I'm bound to work in a few years like most of my older pals, above Stackpole Field, where I'm bound to play with some of the same pals—and me on top of Theda Burton's back side and she is bumping and bouncing and being electrically delightful as we are on a Flexible Flyer sled rushing down Bridge Street toward the bridge, halfway fallen into the Saugus River, and provides but a dangerous and narrow passage across one side of it. I am in a danger zone too, though pleasure abounds (and I will remember this first ride with her for 75 years.)

She's 15 and tall and beautiful and electric and has already told a few others that her ticket is punched for the whole night of sledding; and I am 10 or 11 and as innocent as a new spruce sapling on Major Appleton's Pulpit, where that distinguished major made a speech over 200 years ago denouncing the tyranny of the Royal Governor, Sir Edmund Andros, and eluded Crown troops by hiding in a local woman's oven. Such impressions float in the air and are grasped in seconds for those aware. *History! History! History!* *History abounds*, lights me up; the red men, the Sagamore, the Sachem, arrowheads and rasbora chips all over the place, ax heads. A geologist finds Saugus red rock down along Cape Cod where it was driven millennia ago. The ghosts of other villages visit here in my little village, this piece of land, this corner of the North Shore above Boston, this little burg breathing of old. How many centuries of unknown dead lie within the graceful, now wooded topping of Round Hill where we hold Easter sunrise services? How many souls there embedded—or freed?

But newness comes on this midst of keen awareness: there is half an airplane in Theda's yard, an orphaned Taylor Cub, shorn of wings, belonging to her brother Tony, now flying in Europe. There are controls that stand in place, and a seat that fits me, and glass windows I can look out to see, sometimes, the clouds below me. It only waits a mechanic and a teaching pilot and a long due pair of reconstructed wings. I know they will come to new being as soon as Europe quiets down, all that slyness of words slips out of older lips, Tony comes home from his fighter plane or his bomber's seat.

Unbelievably, that beautiful girl Theda with a lovely figure, a comfortable figure, is somehow forced to share these memories leap-frogging all around me even where the river is banked by reeds like fire arrows at the ready and love-lies-bleeding and *aruthusa bulbosa* and secret flowers with Latin names I haven't correctly pronounced yet; how interminably they crawl outward, inward, downward, absorbing, taking the parts that Saugus throws into the river: *Oh!* I have seen the secret drainage pipes, the vine-covered culverts, the diversions some odd characters employ.

But the wind rushes over me. Saugus and history are everywhere and I am captured by my senses. Without doubt we are moving over unseen arrow heads, old Indian trails, and perhaps the Sachem had a teepee nearby, but the First Iron Works in America lies in these grounds, too, and the old Scotts Mill, a red brick mastodon, looms over all. But, before all this, before shadows were thrown, I feel the newness, a place that captures any eye, but once there were no eyes to adore it. Perhaps in the silence of a new dawn one man walked onto the scene from afar and saw the river and the salt marsh

and the ocean and knew it was a wonderful place. I can see him summon others and they bring their lodge poles and birch bark boats and begin to fish the river and the ocean and dig the clam flats and feed anew on this new place that becomes Saugus. Continually I see the images of the new people who come and hunt and fish and die and bury their dead and accept what is provided in this very fair place.

I hear myself ask: Is it enough to know your place? I am on a sled with a beautiful girl. The electricity comes with another shot. I feel wonderful. I don't know where or what, but it's wonderful. If I went searching for it, I don't know where I'd find it, this feeling of wonder, this new awe.

The electricity comes again. I know it is electricity, the kind I found when I cut an old extension cord with a pair of wire cutters and did not know the cord was plugged in. She has jump in her coils hidden somewhere in that long, soft girl. We pass over the first bump on Bridge Street and my whole body shakes with the quick awakening, a jolt exchanged for a bump in the road, a joy for danger. For a short spell we are air-borne until I settle down on her again. Am I a pilot in the air, or a new adventurer? I have choices that strike gratifyingly quick; my senses leap. Young is beautiful, adventurous. Did who found these shores know such powers? It has to be someone before that gallant Genovese came courting the new landfall, the expanse beyond.

The wind on my face startles and chips at me and there are stars that refuse to go away from the overhead without a bothering cloud and their egos lie paint-brushed upon the river as though they are waiting for summer to come back. I inhale Theda, Saugus, history, winter, a new freedom breaking loose with noticeable abandonment. The moon is loaded with routes and roads cut by scary arms of broken oaks and old elms the way maps can get you lost too. This is where the elms remained standing gracefully huge, healthy and tall in row upon row and street upon street until the blight comes and devours them, seemingly from the top down to the roots.

History surrounds me and is held in a stolen silence for the fortunate who see its edges, who breathe it in, conscious of the leftovers, the once-hot slag pile of the iron works simmering for three centuries, the occasional artifact toed up on a path and smelling of coal and on the coldest days of the year speak solely of steel in a new form, or where arrowheads catch the summer eye or an ax head comes with a shovelful of earth. Johnny Waugh, our mailman, collects so many arrowheads and ax-heads on his deliveries, the collection makes me shiver. He eventually delivers his vast collection to the library, dies too young, historian, collector, Indian buff.

Ahead, in the massed spread of the partly buried First Iron Works in America, I see the slag pile, a mound, a ninety-foot sloped mound now covered with snow but once was built on the sweat of indentured Scot slaves, or servants as they might have been called. But it dips to where the river still runs, still calls stars down to its bosom, to the wide curve below the Saugus Town Hall, and in the flat of these grounds lie the Iron Works from 1636 and on for a dozen years under all the pile-on of centuries and I see the impulses in it. But nowhere near electrical. Nothing like that new charge I know with delicious acceptance.

Theda bounces. I shiver. The charge leaks damage, I swear. My mind searches. I see faces of people who used to be here and are not here now. They may have had big lips or big ears or clansmen's brows, they may have been skin and bones and baggy in their clothes and had eyes like fire pits, their hands calloused tough as old boots, their dreams tossed like flies at sparkling trout, but they were daily covered with slag dust, barrow dust, detritus, the smoke residue those Scots were tied to, for the price of passage might have been a whole lifetime of servitude. I see arms white-gray in the dust, brawny arms sweat runs on, binding them into years, from some highland or mountain pass and the ship that brought them here where I coast on a sled with steel blades, brought them white-gray to my eyes three centuries later, see smoke and char and cinders they worked with, while counting years, if there was any counting to do for them, by them.

I know they had tobacco and grog, but no electricity, except the kind I know, invented back then, and long before, the kind I have from connecting to Theda Burton. I am 11 still and I am riding on her backside and she is 15 and lets me ride 10 times in one night and the wires never short out.

She is soft and I think I could fall asleep on her and the Flexible Flyer until Kingdom comes or that noise in Europe will fill boats and planes to come our way. Her brother is in the Army Air Force and his half plane, the Taylor Cub without wings, sits in their back yard. I think a hundred times about flying that plane and wonder if the wind on my face would have the same edge as going downhill in the middle of all the history that has played out here in this little corner of the world, on top of a girl smelling like a whole flower shop on Main Street beside my aunt's house.

Planes do anything they are pushed to do—fly over Sumatra or Ceylon, Somerville or City Square in Charlestown where I used to live. And they can drop bombs.

Girls, though, are coy and explosive in themselves, and smile like nothing else in the world.

Just after Tony goes in the Air Force, I am once more sitting in his half plane. It is dark. I am flying thousands of feet in the air, not worrying where I'll go or how I'll land when I get there and Theda's hand is suddenly, out of another night's darkness, on my shoulder and she says, "You got her off the ground. Pretty good for a young pilot, a young steersman. Where are you headed?" Does she know her hand is full of dreams? Makes night stand at attention? That the view is a permanent treasure and the scalped and neutered oak tree the plane leans on leans its tortured limbs onto a climbing moon Vinegar Hill just let go of, the moon ascending and leaving shadows behind?

Funny thing is she answers her own question and offers an impression, her head cocked at a jaunty angle, her deep black hair catching midnight in a glance, "Off to manhood one of these days," and a kind of dry sadness fills her eyes, which seem to carry a star or two for extra baggage, like the river does on so many nights even when the ice comes with a safer crossing than the old bridge. Stars, even the dead ones, still find their way wherever. I wonder if Copernicus, Galileo, da Vinci, or Newton knew all that.

On a smaller scale, I wonder if I'll ever know what she knows.

"Johnny has the plane's wings in the cellar," she explains. "Almost fixed them up before he signed up. Now my mother says she worries every night that he won't come home again and get those wings out of the cellar. She says she doesn't mean it, but she does. Mothers are supposed to worry about everything."

She sounds like one of my teachers, who used a ruler on Rod Jenkins' hand once right in the coat room until Rod pulled his hand away and she caught her own thigh, high up, the sound of red pain following. That's history too.

As Theda talks about the idle wings in the cellar, ideas and images scatter my brain, each one taking hold for minor seconds, small mirrors, pages flipping madly in a book. Then an aeronautic image takes control. On the previous summer my father took me to Muller's Airport in Revere, sometimes called Riverside, and we got in on the tail end of a plane story, proving to me that planes could go anywhere in the performance of assignments or deeds.

The airport manager, a friend of my father's, told us that another Taylor Cub, besides the one I "flew" on deep nights, had landed weeks earlier and the pilot, after taxiing to the main hanger, asked the airport manager if there was a trustworthy young man around who wanted to earn himself some money. The manager produced such a young fellow who was given a hundred dollars for himself and instructed to go to Suffolk Downs and bet another certain amount on a certain horse in a certain race, wait for the pay-off, collect, and bring the winnings back to the pilot. He is also told, "And keep your mouth shut, tell nobody, and there will be future errands." The pay-off is huge, delivered, and the errand boy provides his home phone number where he might get future messages to meet the plane and place a bet.

As the manager says to us, "Last week he must have gotten the call, the plane came in, taxies up to the main hangar, and the pilot and his passenger see the crowd of other young folks around the airport, obviously having received information that the hot tip is due, the fix in. The pilot guns the motor, runs the runway strip and takes off. He hasn't come back yet." (The plane, we're advised, belongs to a high police official in Buffalo, New York and is never seen again at the Revere airport.)

My brother spent hours making model planes from kits produced by Paul Guillow's Company in Wakefield, then he'd fly them off our third floor porch when we lived in the other end of town and a Hart Bus Line bus would run over them or a Hupmobile or a Graham or a DeSoto, all gone their own way too, just like his model planes disappeared under stronger chassis with tires larger than manhole covers.

But now it's winter, flight restricted, and I am trying to decide if winter comes up the river or down off Vinegar Hill, it comes so suddenly. Up the river, it would come in blocks of ice, solid shadows, part of the Atlantic surge; off the hill, it would come in drafts of cold air, gusts of wind off the peak of the hill, carrying parts of Lynn with it, the GE plant, smells of the city; I couldn't make up my mind because both entries had special touches of special places.

"Let's go again," she says. "The stars are beautiful. The night is so beautiful. My mother worries about Tony and Europe and England where she came from." It is as though she is swapping this time for some other time, some other place, and I think that is what dreams are like. I ask myself, am I a dream sharer? Does she share something with me I can't reach yet?

There's only the electricity—and the river—and the stars—and the flightless plane until I am in control—and this whole flower shop that is all mine for another plunge down Bridge Street into history—and into what is coming to me like flipping the pages of a calendar.

We get to the bottom of the hill and pass, with excitement, across the damaged and dangerous bridge.

Pal Georgie says, "It's about time I had my chance to ride." He's bigger than me, older by a year or so. And handsome in a dark way.

Theda stands upright with her Flexible Flyer. "I sold all my tickets to him." She points to me, the stars in her eyes. "They're good until midnight when we all head for home." She looks like the queen of the hill when she scans the face of her wristwatch and says, "He has almost an hour left."

Suddenly we hear from the Town Hall the blasting of the fire alarm, and a minute later two fire engines, their red lights flashing along the river, are heading away from us, heading for the southern end of town, the sirens blaring through the night. I hope all goes well there at arrival, that a sudden new history is not being made, like a false alarm, of sorts.

I have my own alarms sounding, too, my own history being made, starting with these moments.

* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Many Musics

Tenth Series

*“But I’m tryin’, Ringo.
I’m tryin’ real hard to be the shepherd.”*
—Quentin Tarantino, *Pulp Fiction*, 1994.

xliii. Mind is Will

Mind is Will. That’s what the Iterates
taught me. Or maybe what I learned
from them. They are proof that all
the boundaries I believed in were self-
imposed. Society-imposed. A faith
that little is possible, & thus little
should be permissible. Beat the world
back over & over, & hold death off
like a teasing gift. Suffer, & smile, & again.

Mind is Will. I had to learn how to live
alone, but amongst many others.
The Creatures can talk but they
rarely do. We nap together, we often
hmmmmmm, & some full moons we howl
like the dark heart of ever’s bursting.

So I talk. I come to the armchairs
in my ragged circuit of shacks,
& I sit, & I drink some water from
the leather bucket, & I sniff
the seedy air of another spring come,
& I breathe, deep & slow, & I wait.

The White Bunny knows armchair means
talk. She approves, if not too often.
She is my . . . *Tender* . . . is the closest word
in their usually wordless tongue. Hops
up to me, fearless, awaits my hands,
sniffs them twice, no matter how well
known, sniffs twice, & lets me seat her
in my lap.

I let her relax. Still sniffing. But the day
 is hardly breezy, is calm, is dreamy.
 These Creatures can flee at a moment,
 from who or what I never know,
 never see, but this morning is calm,
 she'll listen.

"I was watching an ant on a bus
 once," I say softly. "I was sitting
 near the rear exit door, & there it
 was on the floor. Racing around
 in wild patterns. Likely to be crunched
 in an instant if anyone from the
 back got off." She looks up at me
 sharply. I open my mouth so she
 can peer in. Wherefrom the words.
 She relaxes.

"Under the door was a shaft of light,
 a visible break, a place to escape.
 Did it feel the wind blow in from
 outside? Why did it keep racing
 crazily around the area near the door?
 What was it thinking to do? It would get
 nearer that crack in the door, then
 crazy patterns away."

Her fur is soft, a sort of glowing
 off-white. Long furry ears. A pale pink ribbon
 around her neck. A gift? I've noticed
 other Creatures with these little trinkets,
 bows, bracelets, such. They are not
 simple animals. They are not men.

I talk. "I wanted it to escape out
 the door, even as I realized it had
 already been taken miles & miles
 from its home. *I wanted it to make it
 anyway.* And it did. Found that crack
 & disappeared into it. But came back.
 But left again & it was gone. Maybe
 blown off the bus. I knew it had
 a chance now, whatever chance
 that ants had."

She's dozing in my lap, which always
seems to inspire others. Two brown-
spotted giraffes, no bigger than her,
that is, halfway to my knee, come
& shyly wish to lap. I know others are
nearby. Listening. I wish I was wiser
& funnier than I am.

"And I felt like I was that ant,
running my crazy patterns in ways
that mean little, liable to be stepped
on any moment if I didn't happen
to find the shaft, the crack in the door,
out."

I stop. "And here I am."
"And here you are."

Oh. Fyodor. Small, crooked man,
mostly bald but a thick thick moustache.
Heavy dark-blue deli apron over a tie &
clean white shirt. Black trousers &
leather shoes. Not here. *Here.*

"I am. *Are you?*"
He laughs. So much he won't tell me.
Some he will.

"How is it back there?"
"Why do you ask, Roddy?"
"My brothers. Everyone."
"The worst is over. There's not much to take.
What's left isn't stored centrally anymore.
The weak are being trained to strength. Or."
"Or."
"Why do you ask, Roddy?"
"*Or?*"
"They're let to die. Painlessly as possible."

Is this what I imagine? Talking to an
hallucination of the market man?
Thinking I'm holding a sentient White Bunny
in my hands?

"Roddy. You made it out. You're valuable.
You can't go back. *You have to survive.*"

"Why?"

"You'll be needed."

"When? Why? By who?"

Fyodor nods to the White Bunny. "They
choose their laps carefully. You're not
alone, Roddy. They will help you."

"And you?"

He's silent, head bent, studying his rude fingers.

"I wish I could have prepared you better
for this."

"Are you a spectre? A figment?"

"No. I'm as present right now as you &
her."

"Right now?"

"One, none, many, Roddy."

"One, none, many?"

Then he cackles, strangely. "Mind is Will."

I back off the next time I see him.

I *hmmmmmm*, the White Bunny joins in,
of course, & those watching from
the nearby shadows, trees, leaves,
bushes. Fyodor smiles, listens, eyes
closed, does not join in.

The White Bunny sudden hops off my lap,
& away without a glance. Her way.

I feel a quiet elation. She leaves
when I'm safe to leave. I know
I'm OK when she wordless goes.

The giraffes, or whoever else happens
to be lapping, leave too, by their
own whim.

I sit into the evening, the darkness
wrapping in & around & throughout
these White Woods, a peacefulness
I feel but do not know.

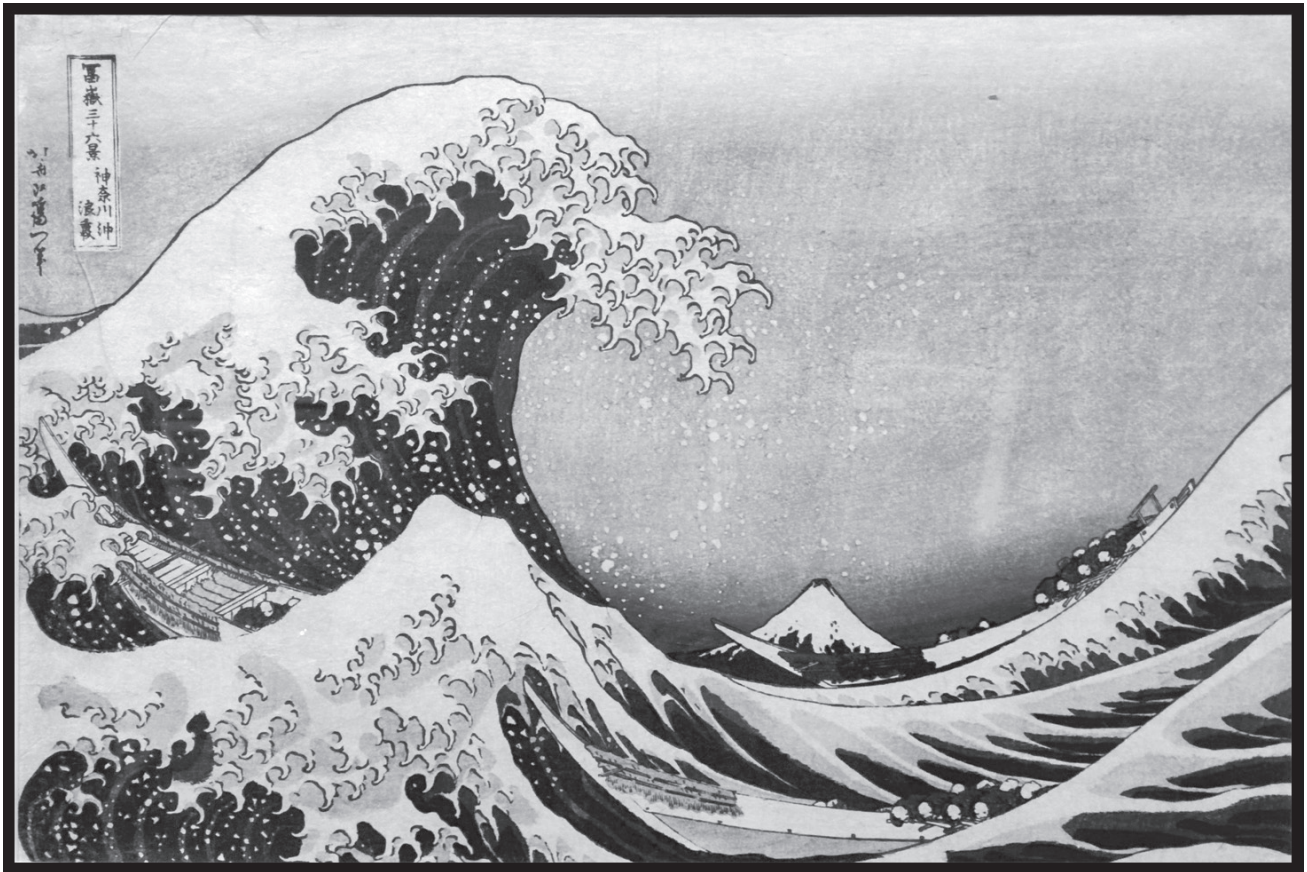
Mind is Will. It's why Iterates like Fyodor
 can be here & elsewhere both. *One, none,*
many. It's how Iris shares my dreams to
 write her letters. Wherever, whatever
 she is. It explains the imp I see, then two,
 then many, a cackling hoard of them,
 then two, one, none. "Stranger strengths
 bide this world," Iris wrote, my dream,
 our dream, my hand, our hand. "And we
 are like lovely notes among their long,
 long tunes."

Move from armchair through unpainted
 wooden door into shack. There are candles
 I've left here. I don't light them. Just
 into the bed, under its quilt, take up
 with my remaining wakefulness its text.

Yes, each quilt is a text, telling a part
 of some great Myth of Things.
 It was this quilt taught me of
 the Iterates, how to think of them.

Eyes closed, breathing shallow, I'd
 finger through, inch by inch, of the
 quilt, trying to teach myself its
 length & breadth, the stones,
 the coins, the shells. Memorize
 by fingertips. But I couldn't.
 They would change. Increase &
 decrease in number. Each one
 identical & distinct from its others.
 The coins, the stones. *Iterations,*
 the word the darkness told me,
 I don't know. I called them
 the Iterates.

A survival move, from far in space
 & forgotten time. A way to know,
 multiply. Never be an ant lost from its nest.
 Far from nest, in nest, *both.*



Katsushika Hokusai

Could I be me, here in this bed, &
 in the other shacks too, one, none,
 many? I was still learning
 how high the boundaries that
weren't really there. I was
 still learning of life as possibilities,
 not limits. Still shitting out the many
 songs celebrating, mourning those limits.

I let go my fingerings & simply lie still
 in the close darkness, the White Woods
 soundless, waiting? I don't know.

I try again, reaching, letting, allowing.
 Denying denials, what could be,
 what mystery, *what else*. Slow my breathing,
 relax. If not this time, another.

Then, something, a stir, a vague warmth.
 Near my hands. I open them, palms
 up. Warmth. The thought of flesh, blood,
 & bone, if not the fact. I open my eyes,
 to let off that pressure. See nothing,
 feel the lightest hairs on your wrist.

Holding you lightest, like a snowflake,
 a shy Creature's glance. Your wrist
 in my grasp. You are here, in this
 strange place, these strange White Woods,
 my beloved home. I am there, there
 is soft music, you are alone, but not
 lonely. No surprise, you do not startle.
 I iterate &, letting go, smile. *Mind is Will*.
 Mind is possible. Mind is mystery. I'll keep going.

xliv. Humid

Humid. The earth thirsts me. The earth
 thirsts everything. I am some of her
 flesh. Her? Him? You? Me? Us.

As long as I live, think, feel, *us*.
 I depend on you. I affect you.
 My kind has done poorly by you.

There were always those who tried better.
 I wasn't one of them. I was grateful for you
 but not vigilant. Vigilance against men
 is tiring, defeating. Who's in charge for appeal?

The ones with the guns, & the good arguments.
 Call them kings, presidents, führers,
 priests, rock stars, prophets, whatever.
 Most will hoard the green like they hoard
 the women & the water, but little more.

So I didn't follow. I was lazy. No fanatic's claw.
 I followed lace skirts & thought my power
 to undress was power to know feeling,
 cause & shape it as I willed.

*But you know, earth, that men join & rend
 flesh like shadows play cave walls.*

*We best thirst when we then drink
 together.* The smoking city I left behind
 shows we never learned.

I come to this tall, narrow, empty shack
 to let go. Test the weight of each of my
 memories. Hold my purring friend,
 the quilt who keeps here, neat in the corner.

My teacher never asked if I'd loved
 anyone else, if anyone else had touched
 me as she did. And there *was* a girl.
 We read books together, talked about
 our dreams, tried telepathy with plants,
 with each other. Tried kissing softly.

She was slender, blonde, purple eyes,
 listened to music with those eyes closed,
 didn't dance, liked to sway.
 Liked to sway with me, smiling,
 my arms around her, hands twined
 around her waist. Her wrists in my grasp.

Maybe you noticed her & didn't care,
 knew her gaze could charm mine eyes
 but you could singe my mind &
 sate my cock. Is it so pretty to say?

Or did you offer yourself for real
 that night? Was yours a real body
 you would share with me? Was it me
 who held back, wouldn't give to you,
 satisfy you? Turned away your kiss's
 thirst, your flesh's dearest wish?
 No longer to be your boy when I could be her man?

I've tried this before here. To let you go.
 I've knelt naked in the brilliant shaft
 of light upon me. I've stroked my cock
 till I'd fuck you over & over & over,
 saying, "*I'm sorry, forgive me, I'm sorry,*
forgive me." The wood floor stained
 with my savage, sad cum.

It hung about me. The wish that I'd fucked
 you, then or later. Returned to you,
 tutored & taught in women's moans,
 & claimed you. As though my right.
 As though I'd replied that night when
 you'd said, "I love you, Roddy," & undressed
 smiling before me. I kept moving.
 Thought I'd forgot you. Like it hadn't mattered.

This time my water sack isn't near.
 This time I stay when the headache,
 the dizziness. This time I hold my
 purring friend into a hard, panting
 unconsciousness.

The smell of salt. The . . . sea? Open
 my eyes, a boat. A long boat,
 like used by many fishermen,
 out deep. I'm alone in it. Above
 me a great wave, a hundred feet
 high? More? It's not moving, frozen, or
 moving so slowly I can feel single
 drops falling slowing on me. Like time
 has slowed, seconds for decades.

There is a low *hmmmming* here I can't
 deduce. And the drops when I catch
 them are dry, salt, almost no water.
 The tension of waiting makes me
 want to scream. "Just drown me!
 Drown me! *Just drown me!*" I scream.

“Not today, son,” he speaks, roughly, like an animal
 forming men’s words. Everything goes red,
 & I am both in the boat & held close on the shack’s
 floor by a strange man. Long red straw
 hat, feathery red whiskers, mashed nose.
 Wears a long overcoat, tall old boots,
 all red-tinged. Boat & wave recede.

He’s making me drink, little sips of
 water, turning my head aside when
 I vomit, more sips of water. Not another
 word. The convulsions subside. He feeds me
 bits of fruits & nuts. More vomit but
 eventually I eat & keep. Hours go.

It’s dark. “I tried to let go,” I whisper
 hoarsely. He speaks again, & finally:
 “Nothing lets go, Roddy. There is only
 one flesh. *One world. One flesh.*”
 After that, I sleep. Wake at dawn,
 my quilt friend in my arms,
 though inert.

Fold my friend & tucked back into
 the corner. Step outside. It’s cool.
 The earth’s thirst has receded some.
 Pull clothes from my knapsack. Sips
 from my water sack. Someone in
 these Woods saved my life. Knew my name,
 saved my life.

It was when you swayed with me,
 eyes closed, smiling, wrists clasped.
We were one flesh then. The world
 we’d tried talking to *was* listening,
 all around us, *remembering*, reminding
 me these years later.

“I love you too,” I say aloud, finally,
 in front of that tall shack, in these
 strange wondrous Woods. Close my eyes,
 hands to the morning sky. My great
 wave crashes upon me, drenches me
 until I am laughing, laughing into your
 long remembered purple eyes. Open mine
 eyes too. *Sway, swish, sway. Hmmmmmm.*
 Now I can share this drink with all that thirsts.

xlv. The Waterfall

The waterfall is where I leave my name &
history behind. The soft leathery hat I found
the first time I came there. The quilt from
#1 House I was wearing on my shoulders,
that first time.

I'd woke under that quilt, one of many mornings
in that one-room shack. The dim forms of
armchair, table, fireplace. Felt the maple leaves,
chunks of yarn, pine cones, pulped paper in my gentle
fingertips. These were what I now knew, treasured.

Yet I could not tell their part of the story,
the Myth I was trying to learn. Sometimes
I would *hmmm*, just to see if anything caught.

This time it did. I heard something in my *humming*
that was *other*, someone, something. I tried *humming*
higher, slower, to invite, to lure, but still distant,
untrusting me?

No, *beckoning*. Me go there. Wherever *there* was.
It was barely dawn but I got up, kept
my quilt on, no shoes, no knapsack.

I followed like a waking dream, still *humming*
& following by harmony. These moments didn't
happen often but it's like I would trip them,
intentionally or no, & nothing to do but
follow, learn, hope. *Pay attention*.

The White Woods have secret paths
only opened sometimes. For purpose.
I had not known this one before, following
it downhill, many tall tall pine trees,
quiet, they were not *humming* with me.

Eventually the trees thinned out to
a rocky walk, now climbing, now noise
in the distance, a shimmering in the air,
a glowing vagueness until it's like
I step through a gauzy sheet & there
it is before me.



Katsushika Hokusai

A great, great waterfall. I'm looking up
 from a ledge near its base. It seems
 hundreds of feet above me. Falling like
 the mightiest power in the world. Yet
 cognizant of me. How? *How?* This wet,
 titanic power had drawn me to it,
 & was aware that I had come.

I stand for a long while, watching,
 feeling, forgetting to *hmmm*, forgetting
 nearly everything. Then I look down &
 there is the soft leathery hat. Flung
 from the waters? I don't know. *I don't know*
how to know. But I pick it up &
 put it on me, like a gift, feel anew
 the warm quilt I've kept on as
 I came out here. *This is safe*. But more.

I begin to iterate along that rocky ledge.
 One to see the mighty cascade of water.
 One to hear its rocky music, renew my *hmmm* with it.
 One to smell—what?—cherry blossoms
 near? Is that possible?
 One to taste—how?—this waterfall knows
 I am flesh, feeds me something good,
 not water, not solid, like a kind of mead.
 One to touch, water is not solid & yet
 it seems nearly to have fingers to grasp
 my arms, stroke my face.
 One for beat, the heart in my chest
 & the one in this Beast, for I feel it has
 one too & therefore must live somehow.
 One for breath, because this Beast of a
 waterfall feels mine too quick &, touching
 me, holding me, slows my breath. *Once, twice,*
breathe, relax.

I stand side by side by side by several more
 until we start to pass through each other,
 combining in forms, deeper & deeper immersion
 in this moment, always have been here,
 always falling, always the blinding sheets
 of water before me,

*always the mighty cascade,
 always its rocky music,
 always the cherry blossom perfume,
 always the mead touched to my lips,
 always a kind of embrace, a close, wet kiss*

*always my fingers & bare toes numb,
 always the touch of something warm,
 always the taste of always,
 as I take off my hat & quilt &
 enter the waterfall.*

I am tasted, chewed, swallowed.
 After a timeless length, released.
 "Return, Roddy. You are needed.
 But come to me when *you* need,
 when you are too heavy. Here you
 will be salved, always."

The path back to #1 House seems shorter,
 I barely feel its passage, & yet
 am soon arrived. The door left partway
 open, tho everything within dark & quiet.

I would hardly know it all from a dream
 but the still-damp quilt I huddle
 back to bed with. But for the soft leathery
 hat I wear new, & now, & always, as
 strange gift of my strange new friend.

xlvi. Eclipse

I dream the great mountain again,
 a high snowy Beast. I am working
 along a pond in winter far below, spearing
 fish, sweating my hours. My thoughts
 dispersed in holding my pose, spear
 held steady, watching deep in the depths.
 Waiting.

But it does no good.

I keep watching the reflection of the pond
 instead, how the mountain reflects
 crookedly, wrongly, how its snowy cap
 much fuller than what I look up to see.

“Roddy,” her voice is strange, sweet, but
insistent in my ears.

Close my eyes & fling my spear wildly,
anything, a splash but no fish, then
no waters. Open again. Again the figure larger
than me. I know they’re old-brown
sheaves of wheat, leaned against
one another, like a crooked man’s shape
but inert.

And yet.

I don’t know who’s gathered these sheaves,
& I’ve seen no animals they will feed.
And, as they have before in these dreams,
they walk, like a many-limbed Beast,
across the field of my mind. Aware of me
near, watching? If so, unconcerned.
Like it has somewhere to get to & none
of my affair.

“Roddy, we need you, please return,”
& I shake my head, cough, try to wake me
up & find an escape.

I try to show her what it’s like for me
sometimes. When I tire & despair.

There is a tree, a single white birch,
tall & bare & beautiful. There is a
hmmming very deep around this tree,
nothing else near it. And then a low
throbbing, increasing like the light in day,
dark in night, & a small winged Beast
alights on one of its lower branches. Then
another one. Tens. Hundreds. Thousands.
Erupt from & into the skies, & surround
the tree & occupy its every inch.
Terrifying. Beautiful. *Inevitable*.

Then the *hmmming* changes, becomes
distant, there is departure, one by one,
tens by tens, thousands by thousands,
they go, they drink back into the skies &
after a long wordless cry in my throat,
are gone, completely gone.



Katsushika Hokusai

Suddenly I am back in the mailbox shack
 where I'd come. It had been a long while.
 Iris's love had not heard from her &
 wrote letter after letter. I find them
 in the mailbox, red arm down. Take them,
 up to the hill. Same burnt brown paper
 & odd handwriting. Each letter begging
 her news, her love, her touch.

I'd intended to leave when a swoon
 found me half-crashed into the crude bed, its feathered quilt.
 To the known dreams with their unknown
 messages.

Now I'm at the writing table & there
 a mirror, none I'd seen before.
 I hold it up, expecting my grubby visage,
 but no. A woman's face, now a girl's,
 now shifting, the eyes oceanic blue
 in all the phases.

I'm in a green nightgown, gauzy, worn
 more for pleasure than comfort. My hair
 is red, long, beautiful. My hands stroke
 down to my breasts, high, full, &
 my smooth stomach. My pussy is tight
 & my legs long. Still Roddy enough to heat
 But still—
 "I am Iris," I say to nobody.

Look down at the desk, toasted paper,
 quill & pen.

"What do I write to him?" Who is asking
 whom? "How do I let it all go to do
 what I have to do?"

I stand. Walk outside. No cane. No boots.
 This body is lithe & young even as I grow
 old. Am I old? I don't know how to reckon
 such a thing. But now I am running
 through the White Woods, marveling
 at how I see far & near at once,
 hidden buds, snapped branches, bushes
 of berries. I run like Creatures do &
 soon they are following, know me well,
 White Bunny, Hedgehog, Giraffes, many
 others, I am running like that is what I am.

The trees get wavery around me, strangely shifting hues,
all begins to dream together, clouds
in the dark-blue skies above dance
wild & loosely, & there again that great
mountain in the distance, joining
in this mad run, this great dance,
& when I slow, it is not weariness.

It is the white birch tree, waving back
 & forth in time, flattens to two dimensions,
 clusters thickly before mine eyes with
 all its years gone & to come, I near to touch,
 near to dare to touch—
 it explodes when I do
 the tens of hundreds of thousands of winged
 Beast fill me, every inch of my skin,
 every muscle, every bone, fill me beyond
 me, beyond the possible—

“Do you understand, Roddy?” I say to the quiet, empty night. I wake, fully wake, for a moment, the White Birch before me, my own familiar body, naked, cold, fall, & pass hard out cold again. Still breathing, but unknowing all.

xlvi. Hundred Bridges

Everything wants. Everything longs.
Call it music, call dreams its songs.

Before I fully wake, I remember to
a childhood place. Never seems like
it should been there, or that nobody
knew it.

It too was in the woods. The White Woods?
I don't know. Maybe so.

There was a natural pond of lilies, green & pink as they are, floating the water as though it's what all living things do, or should do.

I'd watch, come to watch, & to feel something
 words in me didn't try to say. Just watch
 the landed world upside down & foolish
 in those pond waters, the lilies sure
 of themselves, the lilies *were right*.

Waking leaves me those waters, those years
 when I paid attention to the green.

Wake. Big bed, big room, lit by that
 red-fringed lamp in the corner. Wall mirror.
 Heavy curtains. How?

"I found you. This place was nearest
 to carry you."
 Look around & there he is again. Red whiskers.
 Mashed nose. Same long red straw hat.
 His overcoat & boots by the door.

I try to get up but he gently pushes
 me back under the jingling quilt.
 "Today you rest, Roddy. Drink this."

His mug seems mined craggy from deep earth.
 Warm. A tea. Buzzes. *Hmmms?* Not quite.
 I drink. I lie back. But who?

"I come when they need me."
 "Who?"
 Oh. *The Creatures*.

"You live in these White Woods too?"
 "Everyone lives in the White Woods,
 Roddy."

This makes no sense.
 "Your lily pond. It's here too."
 "How did you know?"

He stands, pushes the lamp over to
 the wall, opposite the window, now
 no longer blank.

It's a great map. I feel weird studying it,
 though. It depicts a strange watery valley, near
 the sea, & there look to be many bridges
 crossing water, connecting one place
 to another, myriad, like a dream.

I get from bed to study it closer, &
 he doesn't object. He points to a low region,
 hidden in shadows. "There. Your lily pond
 is there."

"I don't understand. Where is this?
 You said my lily pond was in the White Woods."

His finger like an old old twig points to
 other spots. "Your shacks, Roddy,
 here, & here, & here, & here, & here."

"But this map isn't the White Woods!"

"Step outside with me."

I walk down the stairs & out the
 front door of this place I've known
 often, enough to call it Iris House.

But not out the door the countless
 pale ancient trees of the White Woods.
 I am in the valley shown on the map.

The whiskered man, back in his boots &
 overcoat, regards me curiously.
 "Do you want to see your lily pond?"

I look down & realize I'm dressed,
 down to my boots & staff. "My knapsack."

"We'll be back. It's just this way," & he
 heads off. We shortly come to a river
 & cross its simple wooden bridge, rope rails.

He is ancient but moves fast & the climb
 is steep up a rocky terrained hill & I lose
 sight of him but breathless arrive to my
 tall shack with its narrow aperture for light.

I slide inside & he isn't there. I wish
 this shack could talk so I could ask it
where are the White Woods? As it is,
 I kneel in my beam, fiercer for
 being high on a hill now.

Close my eyes, let the light & heat come,
 & with them a sense of some other
 place. A desert. I am walking toward
 a shack. Not one of mine. No Woods either.

A shriveled little exotic man sits on a stool
 outside the shack. Seems to be gnattering,
 click-clicks, noise-noises. Reminds me of
 the imp.

But then speaks to me, close & breathing
 into my face, eyes like far universes,
"Neither dream nor death is truly a remote land!"
 He then brays delightedly, more gnattering.
 Then more words from far universes:
"We are & are not!" Cackles delightedly.
 One more bit of speech: *"History is the stuff
 of blood & bone."* Leans very close to kiss
 my cheek, I feel his ancient gristle.
 His kiss returns me to mine own shack.

"Roddy! Let's go! Come on!" I slide out
 & find my red-whiskered friend waiting.

We move on, descending the long hill
 as the air gets saltier in taste.
 The sea? The real sea? We cross over
 a rocky culvert through a covered
 wooden bridge. Arrive to . . . #1 House?

Set back on a grassy stretch & beyond it
 the sea. No beach below, just hard
 churning water on those rocks.

I enter the shack, what I think is
 my shack, but inside I'm somewhere else.
 I'm in a kind of . . . Tower. I'm at a staircase
 that circles up & up around a main
 stone pillar. I slowly climb the stone
 stairs, studying the pillar as I do.

There are faces in it, of men, of women,
 Creatures, beings, some look anguished
 but others joyous, curious, content.
 I follow the steps all the way up
 to a great room. Big tables covered high
 in books. And that front window, a telescope
 pointed out, where? Down, not to the stars.

"Roddy!" my whiskered friend calls.
 I want to ignore him, go to the window.
 But I'm afraid. I descend.

He moves to continue our journey
 but I stand. "Wait."

He looks at me. A whiskery smile. "We're
 nearly there."
 "What is all this? No White Woods.
 Shacks that I know but are Towers
 inside. *Tell me.*"

He comes close to me, a man nearly my
 height but far more muscular. No slow
 in his ancient years.

"Roddy, do you trust the White Woods?"
 "Yes," I say. I'd say it twice as hard if
 another word existed.
 "Then come with me. Continue along."

His eyes are not far universes, just old
 & kind. My choice in this.

I nod. He resumes his swift walk.

We descend for awhile, moving fast.
 Then are climbing again, clamboring
 where no real path, the sound of
 steaming waters nearby, & suddenly
 come to a loud, blowsy falls, the bridge
 over it old, wooden slatted, rope rails
 in shreds.

He nods to me, & squats to crawl
 across. I wait till he's across.
 He makes it, beckons my turn.

The falls below remind me of the one
 I know in the White Woods. Nearly
 fall in touching my head & realizing
 no leather hat on it. Crawl & crawl
 the remain.

Some scrubbery & then there it is:
the mailbox. Red handle down.

I look inside & there a letter. My
 red-whiskered friend seems to be
 letting me my moment with this
 but I call to him. "Over here.
 Read this with me, friend."

He nods. There's no woodsy hill to climb
 here, just heights & depths of rocks &
 scrub & water. So I lead him into the shack
 & we sit together on the bed.

I pull out the letter, unfold its burnt toast
 edges, read aloud.

"Dear Roddy, If you are reading this,
 don't dismiss this journey as a dream.
 These *are* the White Woods though
 you see no trees. The Creatures *did send*
 your companion. He will help you. Follow
 him to the lily pond as you are are doing.
 I asked him to make sure this letter
 got to you in the usual way. *Pay attention,*
 Roddy."

Unsigned. Of course. He listens closely,
 nods. Stands up & gestures us out.
 Wordless, I put the letter back in
 the mailbox, & follow him.

We climb & climb & climb & before us reveals
 a great great bridge. Strong, powerful,
 high above the valley. I see that my
 narrow shack is on a hill with a
 gaping hole in it. And look there!

At the apex of the bridge, climbed to
 by a metal ladder, is my shack with
 the two armchairs! We climb to it,
 we sit. The leather bucket has what looks
 like clean water in it. We each take a good
 drink.

We sit quietly. The day has mostly passed.
 "I trust but I don't know why?"

"Why?"

"Why this? What am I to learn?"

"You're leaving the White Woods soon."

"I am?"

He points to a distant dark mass
 on the horizon, far from the sea
 on our other side. "There. A village."

"But why?"

"You're ready."

"For what?"

"For what's next, Roddy."

He stands, & offers a hand to help me up.

"We're nearly there."

We climb down the stairs, pass slowly across
 the great bridge. The light is dimming
 in this valley. He becomes more a
 moving shadow I'm following along.
 Down & down.

Oh. *Here*. The farmhouse. Crossing
 an ancient rocky bridge to it. Missing
 step. Side door. I look around but my
 friend is scarce. I walk in.

The first room cluttered as always.

The second murky with mirrors.

Then the library. Armchair. Bookcase.

Fireplace. Writing desk. A book on it.

Thick & old.

I pick it up, sit with it in the armchair.
 Green & gold cover, a kind of labyrinth
 design. Infinitely intricate. I think
 of the Tower room, its telescope.

Open its heavy cover. A page reading
 simply: "*For those lost*." I turn
 more pages.

The light in the room obscures the text
 or its tongue unknown anyway, but
 there are images I can see well.

A castle high upon what looks like
 an Island. A strange path between
 tall walls, & what looks like a Hummingbird
 flying away down it. A strange courtyard,
 whose sandy floor has been scraped
 into deeply intricate patterns of stones.
 A single white shell along a rocky shore.
 An ivory handled hairbrush. Stairs
 descending into the earth. A charred
 book partially wrapped in burnt leaves.
 Flying saucers in the sky?

It's now too dark to see more &
 "Roddy!" quickly retrieves me outside.

"This way!" I follow his voice, his
 heavy-booted steps. Run out of shacks
 so this must be my lily pond.

Virtually dark as I suddenly smell &
 see trees around me. My trees!
My White Woods!

I follow & there, breathless to see,
there it is. The sky has receded some
 darkness, as skies usually don't, & given
 me a dark purple-crimson dusk
 to find my lilies floating as sure
 as ever on their waters.

I am so glad of them, so delirious
 of my recovered White Woods,
 that I can only watch the light
 again fade. Happy, *happy*.

And my friend's voice in my ear,
 "The White Woods will never leave
 you, Roddy. They have been with you
 always. There are things, brave &
 dangerous things, you must do soon,
 & for them as well as all men.
 But they are with you, wherever you go,
 & believe in you. You will matter to
 the world, Roddy. Now sleep."

I nearly wake but his tough twisted hand
 presses me back down. The quilt jingles
 softly. The lilies are glad for my visit.
 I am leaving soon.

xlvi. Rain

"There's too much beauty to quit."

—David Benioff, *Stay (film)*, 2005.

The rain is hard. It hurts. *It burns.*
I can't *hmmm* my way to one of my
shacks, or for help from Creatures
or anyone else. It won't happen
in me.

I've emerged from the White Woods &
ahead a path to shelter. Through raw
grey fields, to that distant village.

I see houses, church, a water tower.
How long has it been? What are men
like now? How do they live when mine
own city suffers so much dead?

It looks prosperous, green, lively.
Nothing burnt, no ominous smoke above.
What year is this? I can't easily
count the winters I've endure in these
White Woods, the springs I've celebrated.
I've grown older, but not old, leather hat
still comfortable on my head, boots
trusted skin to my feet. Cane to balance,
cane a friend like Creatures.

Are those crows up ahead, weaving
above those grey fields? Or ancient
flying reptiles? Is this deeper in the
White Woods, in truth, where old years
return, or freeze, or slow like the
dry drops from that wave above
my head?

No. Yes. I am on the edge of the White Woods,
leaving them as they will never leave me.
That seems a village of men & women
as I once knew. Mortal, stupid men.

I didn't have to go. I could have begged
return to the White Woods. Died there,
if need be. But this rain won't kill me,
which is worse. It is White Woods' kiss,
its nudge me return to the world of men.



What are those smoky apparitions on
the brown hills beyond that village?
Are those giantess women in long black
gowns & twisted striped hats? Has magic
returned to the daylight world of grab & get?

Are the old myths real? When every last
bloom falls, there will be long silence,
then a *hmmming*, & deeper, & all will rise?

No. That is no myth of this village or any
other. Cosmic Early described it in
Aftermath. It's a wish. Sugar in a
sad man's heart.

I didn't want to go. Even after the
red-whiskered man told me so.
I continued to live in my White Woods,
to travel between my shacks, learning
to *hmmm* the right path from one to
the next. Used my chalk rocks
for pictures I drew, not path markings
I no longer needed.

I drew pictures for the Creatures,
because books spooked them, &
yet I felt they could help me
with the myths I encountered.

I gather flat stones together in an
open clearing, line them together
into a kind of schoolroom chalkboard,
& there I draw figures, one after another.

Always curious, liking me well enough,
they begin to gather around & sniff.
Usually the White Bunny first, not because
a leader but because my Tender.
A trusted position among them for
recking peoplefolk.

I drew figures I'd culled from *Aftermath*,
from the quilts, from the strange book
in the farmhouse. Learned quickly
they shied away from any written words.
Sniffed wrong. So just pictures.
The ones they liked they'd gather round.

I drew a Hummingbird they liked,
the hedgehog came, the giraffes, gnattering
little imp, others. Much sniffing.

I tried images I had seen too. A decrepit
shack in the desert. *Sniff, sniff*. A spaceship
against a starry night sky. *Sniff, sniff*.
Stairs into the earth. Small ivory hairbrush.
Sniff, sniff. A castle high up on an Island
hill. *Sniff, sniff*.

Then I tried Iris as best I could. Long hair.
Sweet, intelligent face, very. A dress neither
royalty nor pauper's. Her they gathered to
closely. The White Bunny said in my mind: "yes."

I would never know the rest, the story
I sought was the world's & here only
some of it. Effects, results. I sought
cause, I sought whys. My doubts
understood the red-whiskered man's
admonition to go. My doubts understood
that the desperate men of the world
would by black machine or black magic
find these Woods, find these Creatures,
harness them to better ride into darkness.

I'd come here to be healed, &
then to help. For how could I
not be healed? By the Creatures who
napped in my lap & tended me.
By the waterfall I would iterate
before, full moon, three nights on end,
more, iterate to dozens, echoing &
re-echoing each other, what we felt,
how to share, *how to share?*

But not yet, *not yet*. Would argue
with Fyodor as we drank ladle after
ladle of good clean water. Noticed
that my White Bunny friend would
not come near these arguments.
Sniff twice, keep a distance.

“Why must I leave?”
 “It’s not me you’re pestering.”
 “Who?”
 “Stay, Roddy.”
 “I can’t.”
 “You can’t.”
 “No. I want to.”
 “And can’t.”
 “The world’s no better, Roddy. It’s worse.”

Hours in my narrow shack, silent or
 moaning on my knees in the beam.
 She appears to me. I don’t know which one.

“I love you, Roddy.”
 “I love you. Are you waiting for me?”
 “No. I’m not the reason you’ll leave
 the White Woods.”

Even the long-awaited letter from Iris.
 The full moonlight. Burnt toast
 envelope & letter within. Shaking
 as I read it.

*“Beloved,
 Our man, the conduit between us
 these many years, is leaving these
 beautiful Woods, returning to the world.*

*He doesn’t know why he has to go.
 He’s bound for doing what I long ago
 parted you to do. What I cannot do alone.
 He will meet others who together will
 far travel to save the world.*

*When you meet him, know he bears
 my touch, my kiss with him, for you.
 A new way for us to be together,
 close again, a last time. Wait for him,
 my love.*

Iris.”

I suppose I began to retreat more
 to the other shacks. But #1 House
 lured me one pre-dawn out to visit
 my waterfall & it was dry, not
 a drop. “The water’s still here, Roddy,
 but it won’t be. Be brave on your way,
 my love, travel brave always.”

Retreat further, to the Iris House,
upstairs, curtains shut, lamp off.
Silence. Sleep was a rare friend but
took me.

By my side sat the red-whiskered
spectre. He touched my face gentle,
smiled his beautiful ugly smile.

“Stranger strengths bide this world,
Roddy.”

“And we are just lovely notes among
their long, long tunes.”

“We share what we have.”

“What we are.”

“Or the world lessens.”

“As it has.”

Finally, the farmhouse. Through
the cluttered kitchen. The mirrors room,
which only showed me now, every
last one. The library. The armchair.
The green & gold book. Its pictures.
I sniffed to understand. I *hmmm’d*.
Croaked.

“Are you going, Roddy?” My brothers.

“Let me tell you a story first.”

They gather close in my mind.

“It was the championship. For the
trophy. The rookie goes 6 for 6,
catches everything thrown his way.
Big celebration after.”

“Great!”

“Cheers!”

“But the rookie hesitates to linger in
a certain area of the dugout.
Uncertain. Foolish. Then the star
of the team shoves him against
a wall & says, ‘you didn’t
read the goddamned rulebook!’
& he leaps down the stairwell
into the darkness.”

“Wow.”

“What then?”

“Nothing.”

“Nothing?”

“Come on.”

I turn to the last page of the book,
 one I had not seen before, &
 its simple lines: "What we feel
 is what we do. What we feel is,
nearly, what we are."

The rain on the farmhouse is harder &
 harder. I hear its old shingles snap &
 break, the attic above me, the same one
 of my dreams, crackle & suffer. When
 the hot rain breaks through the ceiling &
 strikes me, I go. *I have to go.*

It drives me along a sure way,
 & falls hardly ten feet away. I see
 the whiskers, & noses, & flashes of fur,
 & know the Creatures are following
 me as they can. I stop, the rain
 fierces on me, but I stop. Pull out
 my leather hat from my knapsack.
 Pull out *Aftermath*, drop, & let it burn
 wetly to pulp, to earth. Pull out
 my compass. No longer spinning,
 I follow its course now. The rain
 lessens a bit at this choice.

I arrive to where I am standing now,
 able to see the shadows of Creatures
 back among the trees, to feel all
 I've known & loved back there,
 all I am taking with me into the
 world of men. All I serve, all I will
 protect. All I may never see again.

I throw them all a kiss, the one
 my heart has grown all these years,
 & I turn away. Following the one path
 toward that village. Laugh when I
 see the Beast of walking sheaves,
 paused looking at me steadily,
 noticing me, first & last time.

As I arrive to the edge of the village,
 the rain is nearly gone. The White Woods
 looks vague & distant to mine eye
 even as I see it clearly in my heart.
 A part of me has iterated back there,
has not left. Smiling, stubborn,
 I walk on.

This village is empty, it seems.
Not burned, not poisoned, just
nobody. I walk its few streets.
Its markets deserted, its church
door open, but unmolested.
Its homes not ransacked but
not peopled.

I'm not sure what to do, whether
to stay or dare those brown hills
beyond before nightfall when I
hear a soft voice from among the
shadows near the church.
"Have you come to kill me too then?"

I look. Nod him come out. Take a look.
A young man, like I was when first
I entered the White Woods. Scared,
like I had been. "Put down your
hands, son. Tell me who you are."



* * * * *



Dean Budnick



How The Warlocks Passed the Acid Tests

[Interview]

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Before they became known as the Grateful Dead, Jerry Garcia, Phil Lesh, Bob Weir, Bill Kreutzmann, and Pigpen gigged together as The Warlocks. Many of their formative improvisational experiences took place at the "Acid Tests," a series of freeform, multimedia events staged by Ken Kesey, Ken Babbs, and the Merry Pranksters. The following is an interview with Ken Babbs about The Warlocks' participation at the Acid Tests.

Can you describe your initial meeting with Jerry Garcia and the first time you saw The Warlocks?

In 1961 or '62, while I was in the Marine Corps flying helicopters in Vietnam, Kesey was living in Menlo Park [Calif.] on Perry Lane at this place that was sort of like a cluster of cottages. It was a bohemian-artistic kind of group, and down around the corner was this other big house called The Chateau, and a guy named Alan Trist [who would later run Ice Nine, the Grateful Dead's music publishing company], and some of the Grateful Dead guys lived there too. Jerry did and I'm not sure who else. The next year Kesey went back to Oregon, out in the woods, and started writing *Sometimes a Great Notion*. But then he bought a place in La Honda up on the hills on the ridge between Palo Alto and the ocean out in the redwoods, and that's where it all kind of started.

I got out of the Marine Corps in '64, and Kesey and I were talking about going back to New York City to go to the World's Fair, and it was also the publication party for his book, *Sometimes a Great Notion*. By then it was a bunch of us hanging out together—people that were friends and all that, and have been part of stuff that we were doing, and they all wanted to go too. Obviously they couldn't fit in the station wagon, so that's when Kesey bought the bus, and we outfitted it with speakers on the top and bottom inside, microphones on the top and bottom, a Sony tape recorder that ran off a generator in the back, and a big Airflex 16-millimeter professional movie camera with a 400-foot magazine. We were going to make a movie of the whole trip and we were getting away from writing because it was too much trouble with all that typing. [Laughs.] So we went to New York and back, and started working on the movie and editing it.

All the Pranksters—all 14 of us—were living at Kesey's place in La Honda. Then on Saturday nights we would show it, but it would get too crowded, messy and awful, and we would have to clean up the next day. So we started renting these halls and we called it "The Acid Test: Can You Pass The Acid Test?"

The Warlocks were at the first ones. It wasn't the first official Acid Test yet, but it was a Halloween party at my house in SoCal, right outside Santa Cruz in 1965. We were all outside, all the Pranksters and myself in a circle, rising about 6-10 feet off the ground, surveying the attitude and the altitude. Then we heard music coming from inside the house. At that time, the Pranksters were an actual band who played instruments—by then we had gone electric with Kesey on electric guitar. I played electric bass, Paula Sundsten ("Gretchen Fetchin") was on electric piano and keyboard, and George Walker was on

the drums. Mike Hagen was also on backup electric guitar. So we went in there, and here they all were: all the guys in The Warlocks were playing our instruments, using our sound system, and our PA!

So we dug that for a while, and then they played it out and we took over and spent the whole night doing that there. It was a little bit later when we started running the halls, and they came on with us to be part of the scene and play along with us. We set up in a place that was empty—they would set up on one end and we would set up on the other.

We showed the movies on the wall. Roy Sebern was probably one of the first ever to do a light show, which he developed. Sometimes they played, sometimes we played, and sometimes we would play at the same time. We had movies going on all at the same time. Then there were two plastic trash cans in the middle of the floor with Kool-Aid, and one trash can said, “For Kids: OK,” and the other said, “Adults Only: No Kids.” We never knew or ever cared who did it, but somebody would fill the adult one with LSD.

One funny myth that has grown is that we were purveyors of LSD, and the bus trip was all about us going across the country and giving out LSD to everybody, but we never did that. We only used it ourselves. We never paid attention to where it was coming from or who was doing it. We did have one rule about the Acid Test—we said that everyone should stay until dawn because we didn’t want anybody running around out on the streets, acting loony and drawing attention.

So it just developed from that and then, at some point [*November 1965*], Jerry Garcia opened up a page [in a Funk & Wagnalls dictionary], stuck out his finger, and, from then on, they were the Grateful Dead.

Jerry Garcia said that part of the beauty of the Acid Tests was that the band could play or not play, and it didn’t really matter. Either was acceptable and the band took a lot away from that in the long run.

Well, yeah, because there were no stages. We would just set up on the floor and, of course, the audience was on the floor. There was a thing that really happened during that time where the barrier between the audience and the band was not there. A lot of times during those Acid Tests there would be a lot of people banging and playing on things—bringing their own noisemakers and all that, so it would be the whole place going. We had one Acid Test at the Fillmore where there was a stage, and the other place there was a stage was the Trips Festival. That was a three-day event, and we were one night—the Dead, and the Pranksters. We did our show there.

The only footage that I have seen from the Acid Tests focuses on Pigpen as a frontman. What are your memories of him?

Pigpen was a tremendous guy. I was lucky to have all these guys as friends first, and the ones that are still alive are still friends today too. We could get together and not have all that stuff hanging on them [*due to their popularity*]. But Pigpen was free of that stuff early. He was really a remarkable guy as a musician—his voice and his knowledge of these R&B tunes, with his dad being an R&B disc jockey, and also his ability with the harp and with the organ. The communication between him and Jerry was fantastic.

This is what it was all about. These musicians weren’t just playing songs and each one just playing their part of the song. They were paying attention to each other and listening to each other, so where one

was going, the other one would go with them. When Pigpen would be doing his thing, Jerry would be playing along with him—it was really those guys meshing and playing back and forth together, complementing each other musically.

We were still filming when we were making the Acid Tests. We still had the camera and everything. This one Acid Test that we had in LA, we had the camera going and we almost did get all of Pigpen on that! We did the sound system ourselves and the mics and everything. We had a screw-up there when he was doing “King Bee” and a few other songs. You can hear him OK on the PA, but his voice wasn’t coming through into the board and into the tape recorder. All the others were, and that was really bad because if that didn’t happen we would have some dynamite tapes. Still the tapes we did get were really good and their playing was unique—you couldn’t describe it as a form, type, or style. It had a little bit of country, a little bit of R&B. and it had the trip-out.

Jerry Garcia’s taste in literature seemed to be pretty close to your own. Can you talk about that side of Jerry or the other band members?

I would have to admit that Jerry was my closest friend of the band, and I would go to his house a lot, and we spent a lot of time together talking about stuff. He was an all-around good guy. He liked literature, philosophy, religion, far-out-spacey stuff—he could get into any of it. The guy had a brilliant mind, and he liked to rap. We always had a good time and he would like to come on and goof. His tastes in books were similar to mine because we liked stuff that had a very good plot and a lot of imagination to it.

Jerry was on that line of freeform, off the wall, spontaneous eruption stuff that did not follow any script or require any figuring-out ahead of time. Kerouac really brought it to the forefront with *On The Road*, but he was inspired by Neal Cassady, who did it as an art form by talking. Kesey and I read that in ’57 when we were seniors in college. We were thinking about doing some writing, and it totally had influenced us because it is about having the ability to blow. Just go and let it come.

Cassady talked a lot about the lag, the one thirtieth of a second lag between the thought and the brain, and the notion with the pen and the typewriter to bring it to life. The notion of racecar driving was his metaphor for everything, because the reaction times of these drivers had to be so fast that they could lick the one thirtieth of a lag. Neal was the same way, in which he would talk without thinking ahead of time. Jerry was part of that in his own way.

Looking back on those performances by The Warlocks and the Grateful Dead, is there a moment that jumps out at you?

Well, the classic one I think about all the time is “Dark Star” in 1972 out on the Creamery Field Trip [8/27/72]. That was unbelievable; there will never be anything like that again. The day, the acid, the music, everything—the heat! The guitars were all warped. We shot a hell of a movie! When we went to go show it to them, they all bitched and said that their guitars were out of tune, and they did not want it out there. I was like, “Shit . . .” [*Laughs.*]

* * * * *

*WITHIN'S WITHIN: SCENES
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Labyrinthine

[a new fixtion]

Part Ten

*"Try to forget me.
Try to erase me."*

—Pearl Jam, "Jeremy," 1992.

l.

Trip Town was for a few episodes a novelty that record numbers of people tuned into. Shocking even to the network showing it that something involving the likes of me, a cult director at best, could reach & touch so many people.

The demand was so great for that two-hour series premiere that they showed it three times in a week, pre-empting other shows.

When the next episodes were broadcast, enthusiasm waned a little. Not completely; my colleagues could make good television, but it was I that had conceived the thing; they tended to work less ambitiously. I liked what they did, though it wasn't close to my work.

Then, to thumbnail it to now, I returned for the second season premiere. It was a flashback episode, a sort of prequel to what I'd done the first time. Again, I re-invented the show by my will & whim. The network loved it, whatever *it* was.

But it was the third season premiere that went far further than the rest. It was the episode that featured Cordelia, Gate-Keeper's lost amour, & it crossed-over with *Clarendon Island*. I'd found her & I'd found a way to enact my plan.

And I did it very simply, as it turned out, after trying & failing with more complex ideas.

I built between the two shows a *Bridge of Glass*, & thus all could pass back & forth, *including myself*.

The setting is new, a vast old apartment above the S & G Pizza. Monday nights, free slices between 11 pm & midnight, shitty dollar pizza at best but look out the lines on Monday nights at 11! People would eat their slices in line for next. All in good fun, although I did emphasize the fattening cheeks & asses, the wet chewings, the loud swallowings—

The apartment. It's a safehouse, really. A party house. Well, both. People being smuggled through would have a good night there, music, drugs, sex. On their way to less comfort, to hiding.

Some people believed thereafter it was real, the aliens, the safehouse, the parties—

I mean, a lot of it *is* real but not so simple like on the TV. Not everyone was so fucking pretty. Not everyone orgasmed in time with everyone else.

But that's just the premise, before the first commercial.

Come back from that, close up of a man fucking a girl against a wall, camera showing tangle of fingers, cock, panties, miniskirt—her moans are real, are pleasurable, there's none on his face as he drives in & again & again—

& then sees them, above her blonde head crushed by him against the wall.

A . . . what? . . . he drives in her slower, she'd kept her blouse on, her skirt just lowered. He reaches around & just simply tears it from her body. It's a party. *She's not his girlfriend.* He . . . drives . . . does . . . drives in more . . . not . . . fucking care . . .

There? On the wall. One, two? What are they? Her moans are too loud even for this party, & still he won't let up . . .

An inch high. A black & white pandy bear, in a frock? Laughing, no, cackling . . . *cackling*

He turns around, pushes her head down there, he can't remember how experienced she is. Whatever. *Suck, bitch.*

Cackling & scattering all over the wall, high & low, he can't count how many, scatter & move in all directions & he panics to follow, his cum is on her face, pretty expensive lead actress tits, raises her head finally, that hour's ratings spew all over the records.

[Cordelia ad libbed it, of course; she was supposed to suck him off, finish, raise her head. But she tongued his cock free just as he was cumming, jerked ever so slightly, so he would spew her tits & face. Same move that night long ago with Gate-Keeper. Her wordless message to him now.]

After the commercial, he is in a corner of the party nervously watching a really long joint get passed around—

Calms after the neighborhood boys in blue appear, each snap off a piece of the long joint, into pockets for later, & bid a night to all—

There's an old man in a floppy hat, sitting next to Jack, not sure when we learned his name but of course—

The old man talks aloud, hard to say to whom or even if whom—

“My task was to lay down the stones, from the highway, through the Woods, along the water & arriving to his hut. Small round stones, each one unique, a thin white path to follow even by deep night's moon glow—

“Eventually I came inside & saw how twas the angels food cake they'd medicined, several pieces came my way, so light, so dosed.”

The old man roughly stands & grasps, drags, hugs Jack as they leave the apartment & down the stairs to the street.

“Late on, whoever was serious, not laid, out, the Doctor leads the few of us through a secret panel in the living room wall. Leads us in, & a whole new cake. A whole new party,” he cackles softly in Jack's

ears, “whole new party,” & grabbing Jack’s face directs it roughly to the S & G Pizza neon sign hanging off the building, & his apartment above that. Fucking neon blinking in his dreams.

But that. *Fuck me, that.* Cut to commercial.

It’s a Bridge of Glass. It emerges from his apartment’s front window, the one about 10 feet higher than that fucking neon sign.

Emerges & arcs into the night, nothing to uphold it, a miracle of surreal architecture, there & not there both—

But it wasn’t done just there yet—

Yes, this was the *Bridge of Glass* that, only that one night, extended all the way to Clarendon Island—

How did he do it? He told nobody in the *TripTown* cast or crew, nor the press, nor anyone—

The *Clarendon Island* episode received Gate-Keeper cleanly even as *TripTown* was left with a Bridge of Glass—

Gate-Keeper alone used it to get somewhere, it was why he’d conceived it, literal & figurative cross-over—

Nobody the next day knew quite what had happened. Really high ratings, as usual for *TripTown* season premiere. Not as high as season 2’s, certainly not season 1. But sure to be all sorts of strange hijinks in *TripTown*!

Gate-Keeper jumped because he knew the network was done with *TripTown*. Not enough blood, not enough starlet titty. Good American soap titty too, not surrealist maybe titty maybe lines from the *Book of Job* spelled out in cow shit—

They were ready for him, finally, the show he’d idolized in black & white on his 13” screen, darkened bedroom, can of Sprite, bag of pretzels, come on just after *Dukes of Hazzard* & *Incredible Hulk*—*that show* was ready for him to take over—

li.

Jazz & I are walking along the rocky shore, hands tight, here is where I bring her to them, they take her in, take her back, this is why they let me retrieve her, this is what I agreed to—

I make us sit, crosslegged, facing each other, my view of her against the whole ocean & horizon, hers of me & the Island.

She is so heartbreakingly pretty. And her smile is for me. She doesn’t care why we’re here, just that I went & got her when it was all lost in her heart.

“I’d given up, Toby.”

“I know.”

“I’d fought. Lost. Kept losing.”

"I know, Jasmine."

"But you brought me *back*. Through fucking *time*, Toby. You loved me enough."

"They sent me."

"Do you love me, Toby?"

"Yes."

"Say it, Toby."

"I love you, Jasmine."

"We're going to free them, Toby."

"We?"

"Don't you think I know they're trapped?"

"Trapped."

I stare at your brilliant beautiful grey eyes & say softly, "I have to go somewhere & jack off really hard to what I want to do to you."

Your eyes laugh, mocking, gorgeous, follow me shaky down the rocky beach, I finally find some rocks & a shadow—

& toward some sweet fucking relief. But:

"Do I feel good to you?" In my shadow.

"*Oh*."

"Tight? Smooth?"

I start to whimper. "Please, Jasmine. I love you."

"I love you." She's in my arms, somehow she's stripped us.

"I can't. We can't."

"We can. Here we are."

I hold you, hold tight onto you—

Something, electric, high & sweet, she's *hmmmmmmmmmm* long, high & low, we are twined in this music deeper & deeper, she is ocean, I am Island, both, neither, I feel her breathing, feel her heart beating, feel the sweat on her skin, this is between us, she's been trying to show me, we're an us, whatever was, whatever was—

"We're an *us*, Toby"

"We're an us."

"Tell me."

"I can't fuck you yet."

She laughs, delighted. "Why?"

"We're not free. Not yet. Which means I have to protect you. Which means my cock isn't on fucking you wild but on protecting you." I'm silence.

Jazz gulps. "Nobody ever thought it through with me before."

I stand, offer my hands, hold her lightly. "Let's go to them now."

lii.

It began in a dream, maybe, the kind that washes into waking, do you know those too?

It'd happened before but not like this, not even close. A football game. You know, the kind you watch on Sunday afternoons on the TV, maybe 4 or 5 of your buddies & a case of beer, two. I don't. I watch them alone, get some fast food burgers & a bag of onion rings, a diet Coke so big it needs its own zip code & town hall—you know—

But this was me in a dream, & I'm not propped up on my too-old mattress, its old blue blanket & sometimes a crimson & gold one too, shades closed, just me & the black-&-white TV with the Antennae 2000 attachment I bought. Now I sorta get in 3 stations instead of sorta getting in 2—

Whatever—not my point—I'm dreaming & *I'm in the game*—

For awhile, just a magically good seat, like a camera that floats bodiless among the players, following who has the ball, cutting between players, eluding, leaping, tackling, getting tackled

Then it's like—see—*I'm not in my shitty apartment anymore—I'm one of the players*—

I don't know how to control it at first—I don't play those video games everyone likes—it just seemed like I would be one minute watching the play, the replay, listening to the dumbass announcers, & then I'd be one of the players, huddling up, the quarterback barking out numbers & words that made no sense, the break, the formation, the looney tunes speed the plays moved at—

I'd be in the man's body like it was my own, but I would *still be myself*—it's like—*I don't know*—

But it was a dream—I'd wake up—a really good dream, & *I'd wake up* in my shitty hovel jobless, collecting unemployment

I'd dropped out of art school, out of music school, out of a literature major—I was living poor because my money was running out slowly—I couldn't ask for more—*wouldn't*—

The last time it happened like this—a good fucking dream—but *a dream still*—I woke & I tried to get it down on paper better than I had—tried to get all the details down—

I wrote: “Maybe it's a playoffs game, I don't know, but the crowd is so loud I can't hear my thoughts. It feels like late fall but I'm sweating, everyone is. Very humid, chilly & humid. Late in the game. Before I fall into this dream I'm excited, I've got my big soda, tub of cherry vanilla ice cream in my little microfridge, big orange bag of cheese puffs, two burgers, bag of onion rings, feeling set, locked—

“I don't sleep this time. I mean, it's a real game, I'm awake, & the real shit happens, I'm in my shitty hovel until late in the game when now I'm on the field, cheering, sweating, the tight uniform on my good muscled player's body. I feel aches & pains all over, but power, so much power in me—

“But we're losing late in the game & it looks perilous. Under 30 seconds, no time outs. I'm in the back field with the tight end. The snap, the quarterback shifts to the left even as the line & we in the back field shift to the right. He flips it to the tight end who races to the line, just in the sideline, its bad though, since the defense isn't fooled, is coming at him full force, so he cuts back to the left, like he'll take any gain, but he flips it to me, it catches the whole defense off guard, “run, straight in, motherfucker, run!” he screams as four players collapse onto him, & my way is clear, I run like a ray of light, straight into the end zone, it's about 30 yards, run like my waking body never could, & score the winning touchdown!”

It's night. The 11 p.m. news is on. I keep it on to see who won the game. I'd fallen asleep, right? What was the score?

It was close, back & forth scoring, & it looked like my team was going to lose when, less than 30



seconds left, the QB drops back to the left, flips the ball to the TE to the right who, just before he hits line for no gain, cuts back to the left too & suddenly tosses to the running back nobody'd noticed, who runs like a blaze into the end zone. Touchdown! Win!

I was him. T-Bone Williams, they call him. Second year running back, a back-up with moments like that, mad speed & perfect execution. But also lots of dropped balls, missed blocking assignments. An off the field taste for sexual adventures with barely legal girls. Across state lines, fucking in motels, maybe weed, E, L, none of that was proven. All vaguely good fun until the girl he put on the Greyhound bus back home was a governor's daughter, met her when she strayed from the tour of her future (that fall) Ivy League school. A short-skirted wink over 18.

Dream. Not dream. Me. T-Bone Williams. Winning touchdown. *Shit.*

Who to tell? Did I want to? Yah. I did.

Friends? Don't fucking joke. Family? They thought I was hitch-hiking, with my non-existent friends. Well, she did. I had a grandmother. Famous artist. Why those schools kept letting me back in. Why the next one & the next one let me in. Why I wasn't out of money yet.

I had a cousin too, a girl cousin. I counted on my fingers. She'd just turned 18. It had been awhile.

We hadn't talked in awhile. Since she told me quite vividly what we were going to do the next time she got me alone. Fucking other guys, several boyfriends, nothing had thinned her want of me.

I hadn't turned on the computer she'd given me in months. She bought it for me & told me she was going to pay for my online access so I could contact her any time, day or night.

"If my face is in a pillow, my ass is spread, & some guy is fucking me like his cock is Superman, & you ping me, I'll be talking to you in 10 seconds & he'll be finishing outside," her soft, low, breathy voice assured.

Turned it on, sitting on the corner of my unloved cluttered work table. Made noises, came on.

I'd used computers, come to hate them. Doesn't matter why. But the chat program opened & I clicked on her name in the one-name friend list, & typed, "Gretta."

Hoping she was out, anywhere, just *away*.

"Shit. YES."

"OK."

"How are you?"

"I don't know."

"Are you alright?"

"I guess."

"I'll come over."

"No."

"Where?"

I really want to unplug the thing & throw it through the window. She doesn't know where I am.

I type. "Where you kissed me."

“OK!” I shut the thing off roughly.

I haven’t been farther than the little store next to this apartment building in a long time. I haven’t seen Gretta in much longer.

Unlike that game, it’s cold here, plain old cold. I need to put on clothes. There’s some from the last time I did laundry. Dust on the pile of them.

Some grey boxer briefs, loose on me since I eat little & stupid. A pair of old blue jeans, also loose, tightened with a belt she made for me. Leather, symbols & stones & bits of metals carved & woven into it.

Shirt. For her too? Why? But OK. The tie-dye one, its shifting image, LSD molecule, Phish symbol, Beatles image, a White Bunny with fierce eyes, many others, & a low *hmmmmmm* too, created to enmesh with the ambient sounds of wherever I was—old black socks & sneakers, the long overcoat I hadn’t returned to its owner, enough money scrounged from the corners among my piles of books & LP records to get me on the train to city & back. A thick hat, thick brown, coarsely knitted, looked like an upside down nest on my head—

House keys. Yah. Protect my black & white TV. My cheese puffs & soda. My dust.

It’s a long walk to the train, one I hadn’t made in a long time. Suburban streets, Sunday night quiet & drowsy. Drinking football all afternoon, work fuck work tomorra—

Then the graveyard & I don’t want to & the voices & the spirits & the jiggling stone markers & the trees too close & concerned & then I’m stumbling out & down Carnal Street, at a fast stumble, empty factory buildings on one side, boulders & train tracks along the other. A brick gun club. A popular restaurant. 10 good hits of acid made this street magical, the tall street lamps, the spider’s webs everywhere, the moon too close—

The train into the city, overly bright, dirty, more crowded at each stop—

A corner seat, a slouch deep into myself, hands deep in my overcoat’s pockets, just riding & waiting, until I feel what’s inside the lining of this coat.

Small. Square shaped. I pull one out. It’s a blank book with a crimson colored cover that wraps around it, closed with an elaborate string & button—

The edge of the pages are grimy, like the pages within have long been filled by pencil—

I tempt. *I so tempt.* Would he mind? I don’t. Yet.

Another train. Rolls over a bridge with the city skyline in view. Like old, I throw my kiss of gratitude to it. Habit. Whatever. Do it.

Berlin Before the Fall, that’s what it’s called, this conglomeration of cafes, bookstores, bars, restaurants, all clustered around a famous school. The one T-Bone plucked that governor’s daughter from, strangely.

A brick-floored courtyard near an ancient coffeehouse called Cafe Democracy. Tall trees at each of its four corners. Round metal tables & metal chairs populate it.

She's not there yet. Courtyard is empty. Row of stone chess tables next to courtyard is empty.

Table on the side bordering the stone tables, a metal fence between them. Third table from the corner. A pillar embedded in the fence where I'd set my soda cup. When I'd come here.

I sit. My fingers still holding the book inside my overcoat. *Not yet.*

A tall brick bank next to this courtyard. Both sides actually. But the one to my left has a digital clock atop it. Helpful when the Lucy has you forgetting what time & space are. Nice reminder.

Years sitting in the late spring to early fall. *Years.*

She came with me often back when. As the years passed, as she blossomed, as boys chased & missed her. She was, it's true, the only person I'd let sit here with me.

Others tried. Girls I was fucking. Teachers obsessed with me. Real friends & fake ones. Nope. Only Gretta.

It was because of the first time. She'd run away from home to come see me. Tracked me down, I don't know how, though maybe it's obvious.

She'd brought her guitar. Arrived to my table with her old blue suitcase covered in Grateful Dead stickers & others, got from the Goodwill. Brought her guitar in its beat case. I'd gotten it for her one year, one of the many annual years we saw each other at our shared grandmother's house. That's it. Once a year from when she was small & me five years older, we met & spent a long weekend together at that strange old woman's massive ancient house. Along the way, Gretta had fallen for me. I knew. I didn't.

I knew. As we explored that massive building, having adventures, most possible only in dreams or hallucinations, I knew.

It was a year since the last one. She'd found out I wasn't coming this December. So she'd run away to find me.

She kissed me. First & only time. I simultaneously tasted deep & recoiled.

"No."

"Please."

"No."

"Please."

"I'm going to put you on the first bus back."

"Wait. No. Please. I won't."

"Promise?"

"Maybe."

"Promise?"

She wore tight old jeans, & a flowery scarf over a tight top. Her hair dark, long, her eyes darker. She was ripe already.

I sent her back that night anyway, because I knew if I didn't, she'd never be let to return.

That soft, sweet, innocent kiss poisoned me. Or maybe my “No” did. I buried it under everything I did after that.

She came every few months. She wanted to try again, but didn’t. Poisoned too.

Still not come. I start to doze a little. Remember the summer nights in this courtyard. When the chess tables were filled with players, young & old, crusty Fall veterans & their nerdy jokes. Tourists in from Cowtown USA thinking they could beat the Chess Master \$2/Game easily. Usually couldn’t. Better & worse guitarists on the cobblestone sidewalk, watching intently the fine asses of college girls passing by in packs.

So many kinds. Long hair, short shorts. Skirts pornographically tight & brief. A blur of moving bodies, chattering, chewing gum. Occasionally a look at him, a smile.

That one. Long light brown hair. Tight jeans. Aching pretty face. High breasts under a couple of tissue-thin layers.

She keeps walking like all the rest, but she also pauses to look at him & smile. Push her hair away from her ear. Walking now gone, but also approaching him, eyes on him, then quickly down. Gone but sitting on the other chair at his table.

Awake, summer gone. Cold. Empty courtyard. Here she sits. Smiling shyly at him.

“Hi,” she says.

“No,” I reply.

“Maybe?” she winks at me. Fucking winks?

“I’m waiting for someone.”

“Oh.” Feigning disappointment.

“What are you?”

“A girl?” her eyes wide, blue as the tissue covering her shaven cunt.

“Stand up.”

“Stand?” Real or simulacra, not a girl used to waiting, or being turned away.

“Go to that table over there up front, near the street. Sit there, watching who & what goes by. When I call for you, come back & tell me.”

She smiles, looks around. Reddens a little.

“Go. Now.”

She does. As I say. It’s nice to see. Whatever it is. Anyway, Gretta’s coming.

I keep waiting. Fingering the book in my pocket.

Waiting, Gretta-bird.

liii.

A grizzly man sits down at the table next to mine. Empty courtyard but me & the sexy hot Iterate up there, & he sits next to me. I don’t look his way save to notice on his upper forearm a faded tattoo that seems to spell “anomaly,” wrongly I think. Deep, old tan.

But he starts talking anyway. I appear to be listening no more him than anything else—cold winter wind in the trees, occasional cars & buses blaring by, my own beat & breath.

“I was on the same train you were. My train car was fuller though, every seat taken, totally quiet though. Felt like a ride to the final punishment. What the fuck-ever that could be.”

He laughs, a throaty thing that seems to stumble back on itself.

"A woman across from me. Youngish, like she has to try a little harder these days. Light brown hair, pretty-ish face, worried. Not the flat game face of all these other bitches."

Now I'm hoping Gretta will be just a little later. Hoping this guy will get my silent point & go. I've seen these cracked orators hundreds of times around here.

"Short skirt tan, mid-thigh when tugged all the way down but, see, she was sitting, & she was mind-humping one of those little gadgets they all have now. Cute little fingers typing at it in a blur."

Pauses. Clears his throat. I hear him pulling out a plastic package, a pause, snap of a lighter, some kind of smoke in the cold winter. Exotic. Weed? Not quite.

"That skirt slowly rode higher & higher up her thighs & I was snared into watching. Speculating. Panties? What color? Thong? Bikini? Boy shorts? Or not at all? Uncut bush? Trimmed landing pad? Bare & beautiful?"

A few long drags. Adjusts more comfortable in his seat.

"Which?" I say. Turning to look at him full on.

Smiles. Nods. But not surprised. Like this was always the point where a silent auditor talked.

Speaks slowly, softly. "The train was traveling above ground into the city. But you also know we passed through a few tunnels. And train-cars aren't all that well-lit."

"Well?"

"I couldn't tell. I mean, I wasn't staring for fear she'd just twist herself away, scream, whatever. But every time I looked, I'd see something different. Bare lips, black panties, nothing."

"Nothing?"

"Like a Barbie doll. Smooth nothing."

I say nothing.

"Call your friend back over."

"Why?"

"So we can hear your report."

As though she heard, she returns. Barely gives him a look but her pretty cheeks are several shades deeper pink.

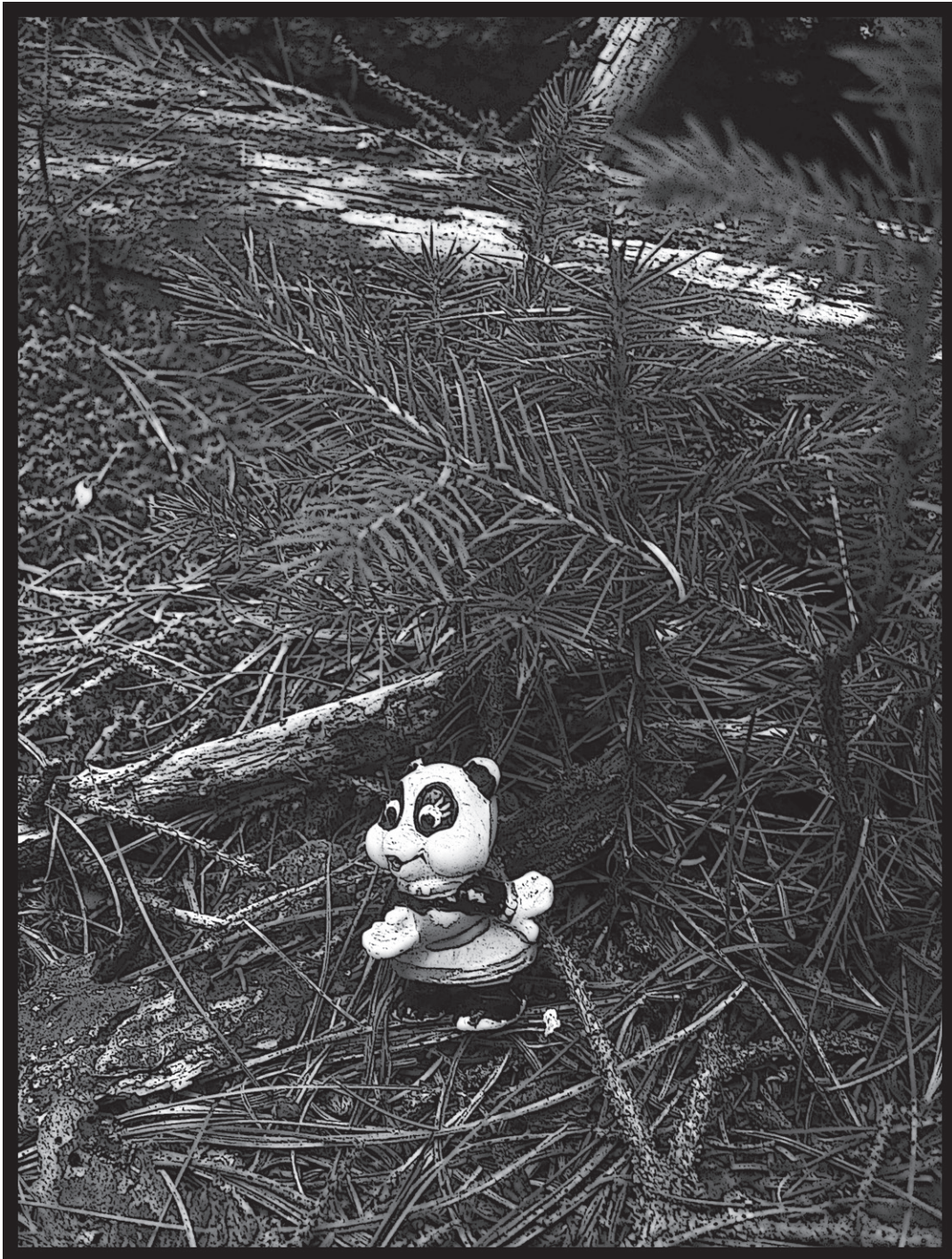
"What did you see?" he asks. She looks harder at me, lips parted. I nod.

She pulls out a folded piece of paper, & hands it to me. I don't make effort to show him.

Folded in quarters. Unfolded, it shows the street before us, faintly as though an unimportant layer. The tall brick building across the street, bare trees nearly as tall in front of it. Man-high iron gate in front of it.

A moony winter light layered over it, & I can't help feeling it's shifting back & forth, moving with the actual breeze I feel on me. This would be strange & magical enough but.

There's a tree branch hanging down from above the picture & into that cool breeze that flows into this courtyard & through this picture.



And there's more but it's faint; small, indistinct figures on the sidewalk. I can't be sure they're even there. A bunny, sitting up on her haunches. A shaggy pup next to her. A . . . very big-eyed little fox? Maybe others even fainter, or too small to pick out.

I look up at her golden brown eyes with impossibly long lashes. "How?"

Holds mine own eyes, then looks down again. "It's your shirt. It's why I came over. I kept listening when you sent me over." Motions to the picture in my hand. "It came easy."

liv.

That's how it was, all that happened in our grandmother's house. Mansion, whatever. It came easy, began one night when I couldn't sleep.

Our first night there? Second?

We three had seen each other just once, it was dinner that first night.

A long wooden dining room, table nearly as long. Tall tall strangely curved armchairs with seat cushions that felt gelatinous.

Gretta looked like a pretty girl but dressed like a boy. She had several old shirts on, the topmost one read "R a M o N e S" & showed the four hideously beautiful band members slouched against a vague brick wall. Blue jeans with worn knees. High-top sneakers looked older than her.

We shook hands when introduced. Her dark eyes looked up to mine, laid a moment with mine, her smirk part hello, part flirt. I didn't know then connection could happen in a flash at any time.

I was a boy in a big spooky house who'd grown very deep inside himself in the last few years. The school I'd been locked up in, or so it felt, had caused me to scavenge within deeper & deeper, find it strange in there, adjust my needs & hungers to survive.

Our grandmother was probably not as old as she seemed. She wasn't one to converse.

That first meeting, assuming we both knew her, she introduced us to each other. "I'm pleased you both came. I'll do all I can to help you enjoy it here."

At dinner, the three of us several chairs apart from each other: "We'll always dinner together. The kitchen is always open to you otherwise."

That first night, only night, she saw me to bed: "Every door is open to you here, Jaime. Don't hesitate."

At the door before closing it: "Don't be afraid to let my Gretta-bird come with you. She's more than what she seems."

That night, or the next, I couldn't sleep, or maybe I was dreaming I couldn't sleep but, either way, I got up from my too-big bed in my bedroom crowded with ancient old furniture, windows shaded by heavy dark crimson curtains, looked like they weighed a ton each, pushed open the door, deeply glad that it wasn't locked, & padded in my Beatles' *Rubber Soul* t-shirt, fragile, torn, *so prized*, & LA Dodgers' shorts, found the hallway lit low by strange wall fixtures.

She said every door was open to me but I hadn't tried any yet. Every book I'd read told me that I should head to the basement or the attic.

Pulled out my prize coin, found in the strange Woods my school was near. One the one side of it, a bunny with a bright-eyed face, sitting up on her haunches; the other, a sort of panda bear with crazy eyes & brilliant smile. Bit smaller than a quarter, but heavier, almost wooden in feel, tossed it. Bunny

side. Attic.

I found the stairwell at the end of the hallway. My bedroom on the second floor, I climbed I don't remember how many flights of wooden ramps in that virtually black stairwell.

Reached the top finally, through door, just another floor. Returned to stairwell.

Luckily, looked up. A bare square outline of a door above me. An almost invisible piece of line hanging down from it.

On my tiptoes I could just reach it. But did I want to?

Took a deep breath, another, pulled. Nothing. Pulled again. Nothing. A third time, it budged half an inch at best.

Bloodied my fingers pulling but eventually it came. A door that revealed a folded ladder that came down most of the way to the floor.

Bloody hands & all, I climbed that shaky ladder up to the darkness above. It was then I remembered the flashlight in my pocket. Could have used it on those ramps. Oh well.

Solar-powered, bright-yellow, shaped like a five-sided brick. Light & slim. Yes, I'd stolen it. It was very useful in those Woods.

I found . . . a living room. A big fireplace took up most of one wall, couches, armchairs. I was disappointed, a little, until I came to the long mirror at the other end of the dim room. My usually powerful flashlight wasn't helping very much.

A ceiling to floor mirror. I could see myself in it. Beatles shirt, Dodgers shorts, etc. But the room in the reflection behind me wasn't the room I was in. It was a library of some kind. Walls of books.

Waved my hand around, reflection did. Stuck out my tongue & it did same time.

Oh, but then he, not me, beckoned me close with a finger. Smiling while I did not. Closer, closer. Till my head was leaning against the mirror. Till I was entering the mirror like it was no more than smoke to pass through. I was now in the library. Looked back through the mirror. There I was. Urging me with a wave to go on, explore more.

This was one way I discovered it could work. There were many variations & kinds.

Tricksy too. An adventure could seem to last hours, but only seconds would pass where I started. Or I'd come back & it would be nearly morning.

I tried to learn the moves & maneuvers to travel smarter. For example, mirror doors would usually cost me an extra hour each time I passed through them.

Or I would not lose any time but arrive to the next room older. Once so old I could barely walk enough to return. A couple of times a child unknowing what it was all for. My self on the other side had to swallow his terror & smile sweetly & coax me back.

That's why I called the girl with sitting me in this courtyard an Iterate. Because when I entered the next room through those mirror doors, I also remained behind. Both were me & there could be many more until all of us returned to me in the first room.

So this was how it began, my adventures, & I loved them more than anything else in my life, save for my times in the White Woods, maybe more, & they would have been my secret always save for the time I returned all of my selves to the first room & found standing near the entrance, silent, smiling, dark eyes, in & through me, my cousin, Gretta-bird.

lv.

Jasmine & I continue our travel on the Island. We climb from the rocky shore up to the Castle.

I am calmer. The kind of calm of people who feel they're about to lose everything they possess.

No matter how tightly she holds my hand, how willing to do whatever with me, because she honestly *loves* me, honestly *wants* me, honestly *likes* me, no matter how she promises that Ashleigh & her former Master can't take her from me, I feel hopeless.

She simply holds my hand & climbs with me. Smiles at me when I allow myself a glance at her beautiful face.

I've not been here before. This is where I was told to bring Jasmine. I'm not sure what all this is or why we're here.

It's winter here, cool but not cold. I take off my letter jacket, red & gold, from high school football, & bury Jasmine's small torso in it. She protests but I can tell she likes my gesture. About a billion times smarter than me, but her heart is mine. Mine hers.

There's nobody around as we walk around the Palace grounds.

"Where do we go, Toby?" she asks.

"I don't know. They told me to bring you to the Island."

Jasmine stops me.

"Why?"

"Ashleigh. And your old Master."

"Did you talk to them?"

"Not exactly."

Her mind's wheels are clicking. I'm too spooked to get horny by this.

"Tell me, Toby."

"It was a dream, Jazz."

"A dream."

"You remember. How the aliens came?"

"I do. But my sister & old Master?"

I stop, kneel, try to think. "I don't remember it clearly."

Jazz makes me stand, hands on my shoulders, her loving fucking grey eyes in mine.

"Toby."

"I can't."

"Yes. You can." She looks around, decides, & then is leading me to a stone bench at the edge of an open area. It is covered in small shiny stones, looking like they've been set into an elaborate pattern. What is this? She's not flirting with me or adoring me as she does, no, she's very focused on my face. Our hands are lightly clasped.

"This some kind of super juju Jazz hypnosis?"

She laughs. "JuJu Jazz. I like it."
And she nods. Shit.

I'm not sure what she does, I guess it might be a sort of *hmmming*? But she's led me back to the dream that brought us here, & she's followed me into it—

In it, the van doesn't overturn. We make it to that cabin.

Everyone agrees that Ashleigh needs to be had first. And to make sure I don't pussy out, they want me to go first.

But the me in the dream doesn't want to do this. *Really fucking doesn't want to do this—*

But all these guys are roaring drunk & if fucking these two cunts will keep the aliens out of their heads for another night, they will. *That's worse than thinking about this.*

Ashleigh's groggy but still out of it. They want to gag her but I shake it away. Figuring if I can get her free, screaming might help.

Thinking further, I tell them to back the fuck away from the bed. I sound pissed which they take for alpha dog possessive & horny. I know they'll just stand nearby, jerking off & waiting their turn.

I have to maneuver their position. That means giving her a line to the door.

I roll her roughly over, & pull off her halter top. Neon pink bra. They're ready to mount her as a pack but again I bark.

"Come on, Toby!"

"No. I'll share but she's mine. Do you fucking get me!" I scream.

They nod. Anyway, it's not like I'm not sharing.

"Push that couch up against the wall."

"th' fuck?"

"Do It. And get in it. Take your fucking clothes off too. Once I'm done I'll call you by turns."

They start to grumble so I simply pull off her short skirt, push back her thong to show sweetly shaved beaver. "Get on the couch or you don't get any."

They sit. Of course they could have just beat my brains out & taken turns but they're pack-fascinated with the idea that I'm "sharing" her. It's a ritual now, not a gang rape.

You're starting to wake up. I tell one to put on some fucking music. Chemical Brothers. Loud. *pound pound fuck fuck*

I'm on top of Ashleigh, feeling her struggling terror. I whisper urgently to her, "when I say now, you run for the door & grab Jazz in that van & don't stop running & screaming until someone has taken you into a police car. Nod. *Nod!*"

She does. Her eyes cloudy but she recognizes me. I know that I'm not the kind of guy who turns her on because I'm not rough *enough*. Would she be here without the chloroform? At least maybe. But always

her choice to come.

She's clear enough to put on a show with me & to know I'm serious about her escaping.

I kiss her, long & deep, & I feel her tongue respond, which is when my hand goes for that tight little thong. She loses in this & I jam my two fingers up her not really wet cunt. She moans a protest. The boys like that.

"Come on, Toby!"

"It's not a first date!"

Our eyes meet again & then I roll her on her flat tummy. Ass high. The boys cheer louder. They can't tell how me roughly pushing her thighs apart is mostly her getting into good position.

"Moan, bitch!"

Fuck, she moans.

I slide inside her now very wet cunt & she moans louder. I fuck her harder & her pleasure is getting obvious. The boys are shouting & distracted by more drinks so I roll her over, so she's on top straddling me.

"*Oh—please—please—stop*" she begs, riding me so deeply I'm ready to pass out.

Just then, at that moment, I say, as I'm driving deeper in her than I have, & she's enjoying what she shouldn't, I say, "*now*," & push her light torso completely off the bed & she falls, & she stands. *And she stands.*

"Run! Fuck, Run!"

The boys are just sitting there, wanting to move, unable.

"It's OK, Toby."

I'm lying there with a hard-on looking at her like *this is fucking insane*.

"Then what, Toby?"

"In walks your old Master."

Ashleigh dresses. Sits on the bed where I am still naked. Smiles at me. Grabs hold my half-hard cock. Now hard again.

"Not even in dreams, Toby?"

"No."

"Why?"

I take my cock out of her hand.

"I don't know."

She smiles. Master sits on the other side of the bed.

"You'll do what we say?"

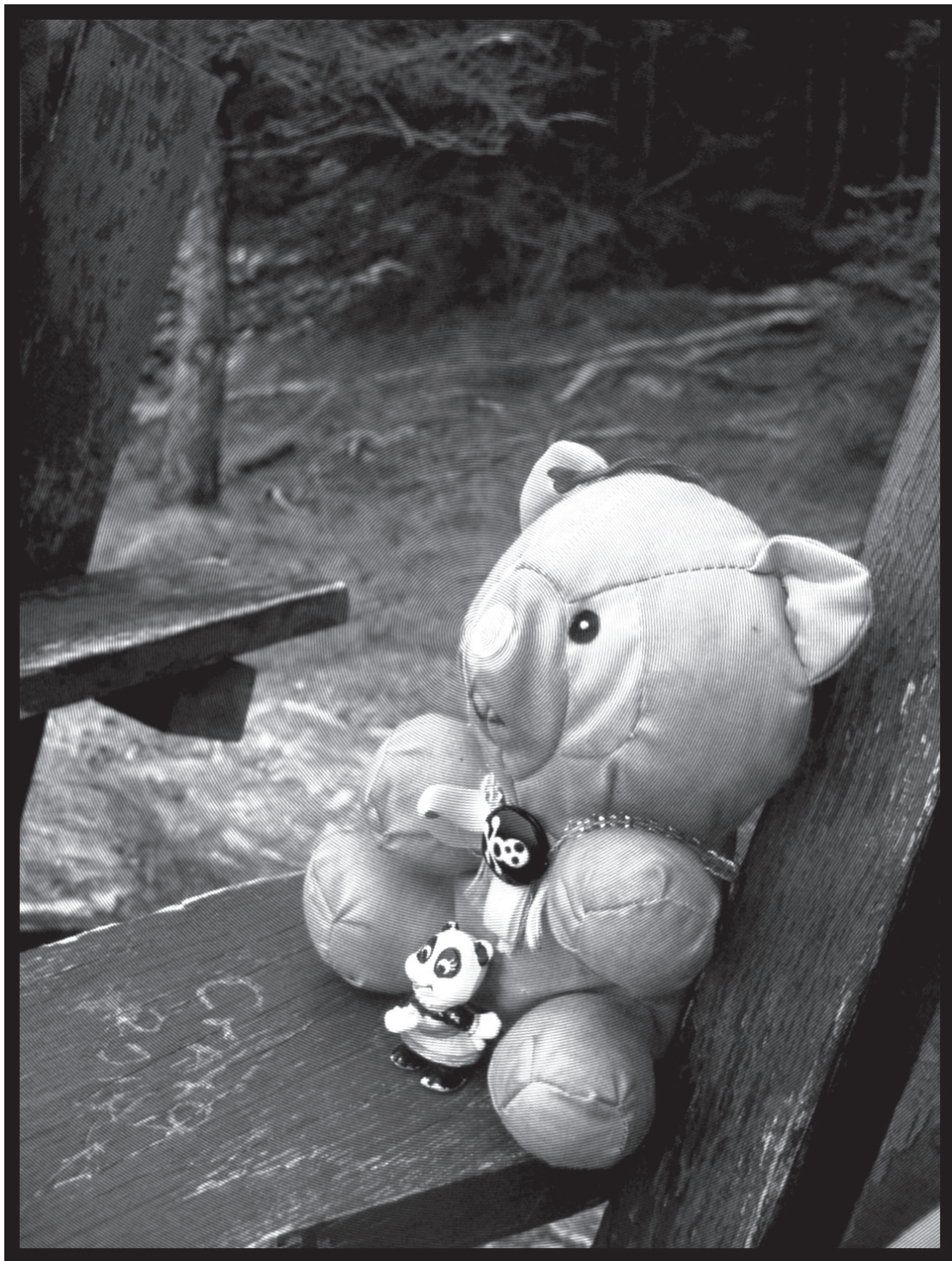
Then I realize they're the Emandians & this is a dream.

"Yah. But."

"But?"

I point to my teammates who seem frozen on the couch, some holding drinks, some their hard cocks.

"Let them go. In waking. For good. Let them live with what they've done. No more. Then I'll do whatever."



They nod. Smile.

“So what happened?”

“I woke up with instructions in my head. How to get to you & where to bring you.”

I come out of it. Jazz is sitting in front of me again. Smiling.

“I’m sorry.”

“For what?”

“For all that. Again.”

She laughs. “I needed to know.”

“But now that I remember, I don’t know what it means. Are we here to bring you to Ashleigh & your ex-Master? Or Emandians?”

She stands. Her smile unwavering. “We’ll meet whoever. I’m just not leaving you.”

I let her pull me up. “I have just one question,” she purrs wetly up into my ear.

Uh-oh.

“Whose smooth cunt do you want to slide that pretty cock of yours into? Hers or mine?”

Then her grey eyes twinkle so delightedly that I start to laugh & laugh.

lvi.

Jack & Isis return to the Realist party but neither seem very interested in it.

I take her hand & lead her into an empty bedroom. Finger to my lips, motion her to lock the door. Try the window but it’s locked.

“Lie on the bed.”

“What? Jack, no.”

I pull her close to me in this dark room. She smells so ready. I can barely think but with my cock.

“Lie on the bed. Masturbate. Make it sound like good slow loud sex.”

“Why?”

“So I can break the fucking window.”

She nods. I can feel her smiling in the dark.

That’s the thing about these parties. You sign a contract to be part of it. However long, stay the length. Not report anything you see. I didn’t learn all this at first, but I did learn it.

If I hadn’t been looking for Penny, I might have stayed around. There were some ideas at play here. Some possibilities—

“*Oh my fucking god harder!*” Is screams & I forget thinking & use a pillowcase to cushion my elbow as I knock out the window. It’s tough, doesn’t break fully.

“Again!” I whisper.

“*Fuck me, you big cocked motherfucker! Give it to me harder! Deeper!*” She then just moans & moans until I get it fully open & use cases to cover the broken frame as we crawl through.

“Nobody’ll come in there for awhile. So we can get away far,” I whisper. She nods.

We're on the side of the mansion, unlit, as I'd hoped. It's a cool night. Is is barefooted & that's OK for the moment.

"Thanks," she says.

"For what?"

"For taking me with you. I'll do my best to help you find your girl."

"Thanks," my mouth says sincerely while my cock is still listening to how this girl fucks even solo.

lvii.

Now having crossed to Clarendon Island, the Gate-Keeper was allowed to participate in its life. And, for awhile, he was overwhelmed.

He retreated, & retreated, & retreated until he came upon, in some trackless part of the Island he'd forced himself off to, an Exxtreem Roadbuss 2000.

About 30 feet long, jarringly silver, shaped like a long loaf of French bread. Buried in weeds & plants. Door open.

"Hello?" he called. Afraid. No. Someone who lived this far out wasn't doing well either.

It didn't matter. There was nobody. There hadn't been in a long time. The Roadbuss 2000 was filled front to rear with shelves of strange books, stranger radio equipment, video monitors, newspaper clippings of obscure wars, assassinations, UFO sightings, unexplained phenomena.

He could not believe there was electricity, when he pulled the main power lever. Suddenly buried in music, TV sounds, film, radio static. A turntable & about 500 LPs crammed into a closet.

And nobody. He was sure; then, as he settled in more, less so. How could someone build all this mad beauty & abandon it? Did anyone else know of it?

Then one day, he looked up, & saw the many broken tree branches above, the shattered platform up there. Ahh, someone had lived—maybe and died—here. When this Roadbuss came crashing down about a hundred feet from above. It had survived so well he hadn't noticed the damage. And it had happened a long time ago.

Had the man, or woman? but probably man, crawled off to die? Or been rescued?

Gate-Keeper just didn't know. There was no blood, no sign that the man had been in the Road Buss when it had fallen. Had he already died, or vacated it for elsewhere?

He was gone. Long gone. And here was Gate-Keeper, in need of a sanctuary & solitude. For awhile.

So he moved in. Had nothing with him but his strange movie camera, & he moved in.

The toilet worked, when emptied, regularly. There was a water tank, no holes, & a clear stream nearby. Several leather buckets. Plus the electricity which, when he followed the line, led straight into an old metal plate in the earth. Unreadable markings on it. That old.

So I inherit this man's home. Him dead or left or gone. He has every arcane book on astronomy & astrology that I could want. Photos of the Mercury & Apollo astronauts. Dictionaries of language & science. A five-volume thesaurus.

More old jazz LPs & rock than I could dream. Miles Davis through *Bitches Brew*. Coltrane to the last note. Middle period Stones. *Sticky Fingers*-era. Early Bowie. First four Led Zeppelins.

I find myself sitting in the far end of the Road Buss most often, in what feels like a barber's chair, padded leather, very comfortable. There are monitors all around me.

This took me awhile to figure out. A flat metal plate, almost unnoticeable, but I picked it up by chance one day & saw how my touch caused the monitors to react.

It took awhile to suss out but I determined that the one to my left showed the live surface of the Sun, when let be. The one before me showed someone composing an endless book, by ink, in a language I could not recognize. The one to my right showed endless shots of a girl asleep, or nearly, in her bed. Long red hair, blue eyes. Beautiful beyond words.

But with the touch plate, & some concentration, I could manipulate the images. The left one was most useful, for somehow, not that showing the Sun live wasn't enough, it could show Clarendon Island, whether being broadcast or between episodes. I could see what was going on wherever I liked on the Island.

The one before me I could, with deep concentration, re-render to show me the book being written in English. I would follow the pages as they filled, never seeing the writer, or the rest of the room he was in, & tried as I could to copy out some of what he wrote.

The third one was always of the girl in her bed. Always night. She would stay up late many nights, I could guess by the white-faced pink cat radio alarm clock on her bedside table. She would listen to the radio for hours sometimes, clear a space onto her floor to dance, eyes closed, sometimes in her nightgown, sometimes nude, a smile unknowable on her lips as she swayed, & touched herself, her taut nipples, her damp pussy, sometimes she would dance herself to orgasm after orgasm before collapsing back on her bed—

One time a spectre came in her window, a sort of man, & he moved into her bed & she wriggled in fright but he began kissing her long & deep & then down her neck & then her breasts, inhaling each perfect one to her moans, then long licking her stomach, tongue slow & deep inside her red-haired cunt, till he was atop her & driving slowly in her moans in my mind despite the silent image, they cum together, cum very hard, & he dissipates in the moonlight—

These helped me to think about other things, find strange meaning in this adopted home, but did not solve my woe.

I'd retreated from Clarendon Island. Crossed over via the Bridge of Glass, them ready for me, & I'd retreated, fled.

I'd tried several new things, ideas I'd been saving for when I got here—they were new—they disrupted what had been seen on *Clarendon Island* before.

“We need some discontinuity for a time,” I said to the cast & crew. “This will help us to get deeper into the story, open it up even more”—& they’d been OK with this, extended me a trust I cherished & wanted to earn—

We begin shooting fragments, just to see what catches—& I work us harder & harder—

Their village gone—destroyed?—a group of people travel together, embody their lost home: trinkets, memories, seeds—& they will, when most despairing so much gone, brew a tea to allow them to cluster dream & live anew in their lost home, touch & remember its details—

They become fisher people for a time, build long boats, fashion good spears, taught in all this by an old old man named Fitz who they seeming happened to meet one day on the road—who convinces them to come with him to the sea, find a new way of life there—

It works, for a long time, until several of their best fishers are far out in waters working when a huge storm hits—

Several of them drown but two, a man & a girl who’d been engaged to his younger brother, arrived half-drowned on the shores of Clarendon Island.

Half-crazy with despair, being lost & several of their own gone, including his brother & her love, they just sit together on the sand, panting.

Shane & the Faeries watch them from afar. Waiting to see what they’ll do.

The two of them had never been close. He hadn’t approved of his brother marrying her. Felt she would distract from the hard task of their group finding a solid way of life.

For her part, it made her try harder to prove useful. She begged Fitz to teach her about fishing, which he was reluctant to do.

She came to his hut but before anyone else had waked. Still in her nightgown.

His hut had a matt & two books & a few strange trinkets.

“I need to learn to prove my worth.”

“To gain someone’s favor?”

“No. Yes. His brother, who sees me as worthless.”

“Are you?”

“I?”

“Are you worthless?”

“No. No! I’m willing to work, to learn. I’m not lazy.”

He’s still lying on his matt. Aside from his long grey hair, there’s nothing about him old, or downfallen with age.

“Lift your gown.”

She stares speechless.

“Or go. I can sleep more.”

“Must I?”

“No. You can leave.”

Never having before a man, yet this one has knowledge she needs. So she raises it up to let him see. Small, pretty breasts. A sweet cunt.

“Take it off.”

Less uncertain, she does. He lies back, spreads his legs, no word or gesture. She knows enough to straddle his waist, & surprises herself by easing his hard cock into her. Rides him slowly, it hurts, but keeps going till he cries out & cums drily into her. Keeps his hard-on long enough for her to cum too. The skies in her mind go white, the stars black, she moans as quietly as she can.

He teaches her to fish. How to hold the spear, how to stand, how to breathe, & not breathe, before throwing. She's good at it. Very good. First girl to be allowed out for the deep water fishings. Holds her own.

Her heart remains at first with the young man, but she visits often Fitz in his hut. After the first time, he is more solicitous. Learns her body, as she hardly knows it herself, & pleasures her by tonguing her asshole to orgasm, then spreading her sweet young cheeks & fucking her hard back there.

They talk too. She learns more of Fitz than anyone else has. How he came out here long ago, mourning the absence of a loved one. He'd been of fisher folk as a child, & nearly starved relearning the trade. Somehow made it.

She wonders if they should leave. Finds herself in love with him, not the romancey pretty boy flirtation she had with the young man, but a real hard wanting love.

She grows her hair long for him, sucks him until he's panting dry, fucks him moaning deeper & louder until the camp of her people nearby knows Fitz has someone with him.

This was to have been her last deep waters trip. She was leaving with him. There'd been no choice.

“They want me to commit to him in ceremony. Obey his will in all things. Sleep in his bed. I would not be able to come to you.”

“Is that what you want?”

“I want you.” She'd garlanded herself in braids & flowers, wore a covering the thickness of a breath, shaved her red pussy in the form of one of his favorite magickal symbols. The one that meant both eternal purity & perpetual hunger. This was her moment to reveal their truth.

He looked her up & down a long time, as though he'd never seen her before. Not a word, not a breath.

Finally, held out his arms. Decided they would leave after that next deep sea going.

Now here she was, the young man she'd not yet rejected dead, & his angry, grieving brother her possibly dangerous companion.

She'd had to suck him a few times too after he'd followed her out one dawn to Fitz's tent, & confronted her returning.

His cock was small, & slow to harden ever for her persuasive lips & tongue.

He'd even begun to confuse this coercion with a romance, love, something not what it was.



All because she wanted to learn to fish. One dead, one obsessed, one on the other side of a boatless sea.

This fragment held good for a long stretch but then it became something else. Cordelia laughed.

lviii.

So a failure. More failures. Thus retreat.

But now I was readying my return. It *had* to be good. I had a story too.

It came from where I retreated to Roadbuss 2000. I had been slowly going through this hidden details in this place, looking for why he had come here, & maybe what had happened to him.

I learned a strange story I wanted to tell. Learned it by looking through his strange library, where he'd write long notes in the blank end pages. His LPs, where he'd draw diagrams on the inner sleeves. Video tapes that would show a hand turning over a pile of black & white photographs. Piece by piece.

He'd come to a place called Oorous, seemed like a town but was in truth a slave camp run by aliens. He made like he was a big city reporter on vacation to write his first novel. Everyone was friendly.

Rented a room above the coffee shop, & would come there with his notebooks, dictionary, a novel or two for breaks.

Front of the coffee shop, right there on Main Street, had a big extended awning, with an elaborate coffee cup painted on it, & tables underneath shaded from sun & rain.

So he would write there, come down early morning, take his coffee, one slice of raisin toast, maybe a boiled egg, & hunch down into his work, writing page after page.

Of what? Of what he was observing right here in town. What people would tell him. What they feared. He became a trusted confidante to many who had forgotten to trust each other.

A boy would come by from his paper route, on his old bike, or walking. Showed him how to eat a Danish with wrapper still around it, neat as you please. Later this boy got into trouble with two local brutes.

Not aliens but probably snitches. I come to the alley where they have this boy cornered, & start swinging. They're cowards. Confess the aliens made them harass the boy for being too often with me.

"Do you love your town?"

"Yes. But."

"*No buts.*"

"OK."

"Tell them he knows nothing."

"OK."

"*Do it.*"

It gets worse. I don't see any aliens, ever, but they're making it hard for those friendly to me. I'm no longer the trusted outsider.

One day a black man comes to see me. He's a minister. Strangely, the aliens don't harass them.

"They think we're harmless or that we do half their cowing & brainwashing for them."

"Don't you?"

He's a handsome man, tall, nicely built. Charming twinkle of a rogue in his eye.

"You're not a real minister."

"No. When they first came, we didn't know what they'd do to town leaders, so we hid him. Still."

"You look more like an actor to me anyway."

"Thanks. I know it's getting hard for you."

"I have my own reasons for being here. But I thought it was just a quiet town, good place to lay low."

"Not a prison camp."

"No. But now I don't want to leave. Even if I can."

He studies me close. Then takes from his lap a brown bag. Hands to me. Nods me open. Charming twinkle.

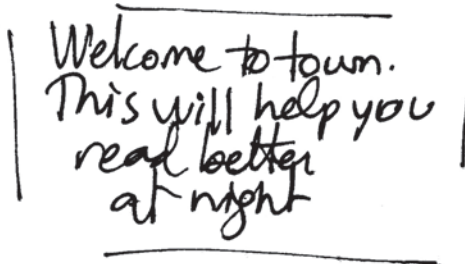
"It's a book. Thank you?"

"Not just any book. Keep it in the bag. Read it tonight. Lights out. I mean it."

He did.

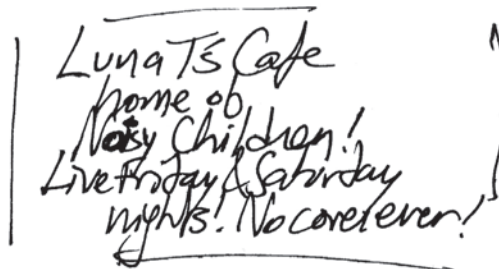
My room simple, small, tho two tall windows opposite the door gave me a view beyond the low buildings of the town to the Woods & mountains in the far distance. I could have read at night by leaving the shades up & letting the yellow streetlamp glare shine on it. But that seemed a bad idea.

Someone had given me a glass jar with a pretty candle in it. I could not think who. Oh, wait, it was left on my table, with a card. I had tucked both under my bed for safety.



Welcome to town.
This will help you
read better
at night

Hmm. Well, I closed the shades & got into bed. I had a sort of bedside box I used for my pink cat radio alarm clock. No radio stations in range. I put the candle next to the radio & lighted it with the box of matches that had come with it.



Luna TS Cafe
home of
Nasty Children!
Live Friday & Saturday
nights. No cover ever!

Sounded fun, wherever it was.

Pulled book out of the brown paper bag. No cover.
Missing the first few pages & some along the way too.
So I just started reading from what I had.

“He woke up suddenly, & the white germless surroundings reminded him that his memory was going & would soon be gone.

“He had been a great hero in these darker years of history. Unlike most around him, he was able to resist the ceaseless temptations around him.

“It had still been ‘real’ life when he was young. People grew from children to adults, lived, loved, lost, worked, played, died in their myriad ways, much as they always had.

“But the world was sick & dying around them & now it was no longer a matter of argument among men of power & influence.

“A sort of revolution swept the globe, a call for everyone with skill & gift to come forward & help. By sheer force of numbers, weapons of all kinds were destroyed. Nation-states fell.

“Everyone felt the desperation & worked together. People rationed, shared their rations. Money disappeared as the bad idea it had always been.

“Doctors tended the sick, all of them. Healing technologies & medicines previously known only to the rich were openly used & shared.

“There were too many of us. The air was too full of poisons. Nobody wanted to do the hard thing until someone came up with a strange answer.

“There were drugs, that once only the rich had known, that could simulate a better, cleaner world. That put the user into a near-death dream-state, needing bare amounts of food & water.

“In this state, one’s mind reconstructed one as young, whole, healthy, full of curious hopes for the world’s mysteries.

“The world was young & new too. Fresh air, water, fresh food. The poisons gone, the skies blue, the stars visible at night. Sleep of an hour among vague colors & a *humming* lullaby, & back to living well.

“The sexual partner or partners of your choice. Happy friends. Your need to be violent destroyed nothing. Eventually the most brutalized soul calmed.

“As the world struggled & lost its battle, slowly, more took to this solution. Not just the very old, the sick, the despairing.

“People called it the Return to Paradise pill.

“What he knew was that someone had gotten a kind of poison into the Paradise Pill. Hospital wards & high school gymnasiums & community rooms of even healthy people, some using the pill just sometimes as a hope booster, were dying. Going to Paradise & not coming back.

“And there wasn’t much outcry. It became the way to go, often holding the hand of your dearest loved one, perhaps going together.

“He was supposed to find out how, & this had led him to discover that the Paradise Pill was not solely a human contrivance. He learned of the Emandians.

“But they had not introduced the poison. This was men. Emandians had lost their world too, save for a few who had traveled through the Dreaming via the Red Bag to this world. The rest had died peacefully in their beds, fed the potion of the Paradise Pill in perpetuity until their world collapsed on them, finally airless & forever black.

“No, someone was speeding up the process, & trying to win back the world for a smaller number.

“So that’s why he had found his way to the Emandian ships overhead, & how his memory had eventually been so damaged.

“He’d gone up again & again, until he couldn’t anymore, until he’d grown so frail that even the

methods they had of reviving him & his memory were starting not to work.”

A missing page here. He reads on.

“‘Why can’t I go back up?’

“‘Don’t you remember the last time?’

“‘Aren’t I coming back from that one?’

“‘No. You’ve been in this bed for weeks. You woke, you hardly talked or blinked the first time. But even after that, you didn’t know me.’

“‘Not at all?’

“‘Not a sniff.’

“‘What would you do?’

“‘She reddens. A lot. ‘I would seduce you. Be with you. Make sure I got you to sleep. Try again the next day.’

“‘You had to seduce me every day? That must have been pretty boring after awhile.’

Shakes her head. “‘It meant every day you wanted me like we were new, like it was our first time.’

“‘He convinced her to run with him. They’d left the facility to the dark, dangerous wilds of beyond.

“‘But outside the controls of the facility, he became a new & different danger every morning, before he calmed, & remembered her. She’d had to wound quite a few people he wildly mixed up with.

“‘Finally, she didn’t want to, but a syringe, & a signal via an electronic in her ankle bracelet. Tiny shells on a coarse string. Third date by the ocean gift.”

Missing page. Two.

“‘It was empty. Every room in the vast complex. He searched & searched, for anyone. For her.

“‘Found two things. An unbroken mirror showed his gaunt face, his graying beard. A bedside table in the room in which he’d woke contained, solely, her ankle bracelet. Sans transistor.”

He closes the book. Is this book the future? It feels near.

He has to go. That’s what this book is saying. *He has to go.*

Brings nothing, but the book in the brown paper bag. Decides to leave then, plainly, middle of the night. Figures the aliens will let him go.

Are they the Emandians of the book?

Closes his room’s door, key under the matt. Down the stairs to the door to the street. Crescent moon, like someone took a big juicy bite.

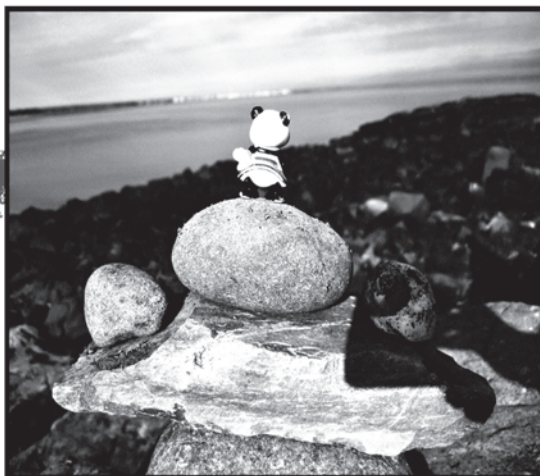
Walks down the center of the deserted street, not looking left or right. The black preacher gave him the book to help him know he had to leave. So he was leaving. Soon he was beyond town center, houses, farms, walking a pathless trace toward those Woods, those beautiful White Woods.

Gate-Keeper would tell this story, of how & why the man who came here arrived to this Roadbuss 2000. Like he had, it seemed. Needing sanctuary.



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NEW ENGLAND

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Charlie Beyer lives in New Castle, Colorado. His writings regularly appear in these pages. Where will he travel to & write about next? His writings can be found at <http://therubyeye.blogspot.com>.

Joe Coleman lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. His delightful poetry regularly appears in these pages. His 2015 RaiBook, *Kingdom of Clowns*, can be found at: <http://www.scriptorpress.com/raibooks/kingdomofclowns.html>.

Judih Haggai lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Her haiku appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Wishing her good healing from a current tangle with a cold. Her writings can be found online at: <http://tribes.tribe.net/poetryjams>.

Nathan D. Horowitz lives in Vienna, Austria. Chapters from his book-in-progress, *Nighttime Daydreams*, regularly appear in these pages. More of his work can be found online at: <http://www.scribd.com/Nathan%20Horowitz> and <http://lordarbor.bandcamp.com>.



Colin James lives in western Massachusetts. His cryptical poetry first featured in *Cenacle* | 92 | April 2015. His poetry has been a welcome new treat in issues this year.

Martina Newberry lives in Palm Springs, California. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Each time her poems come to me, I am thrilled, & grateful to have a new batch of darkling treats to peruse.

Tom Sheehan lives in Saugus, Massachusetts. His writings appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. It is always fun to take one issue a year & publish some of his great fiction.

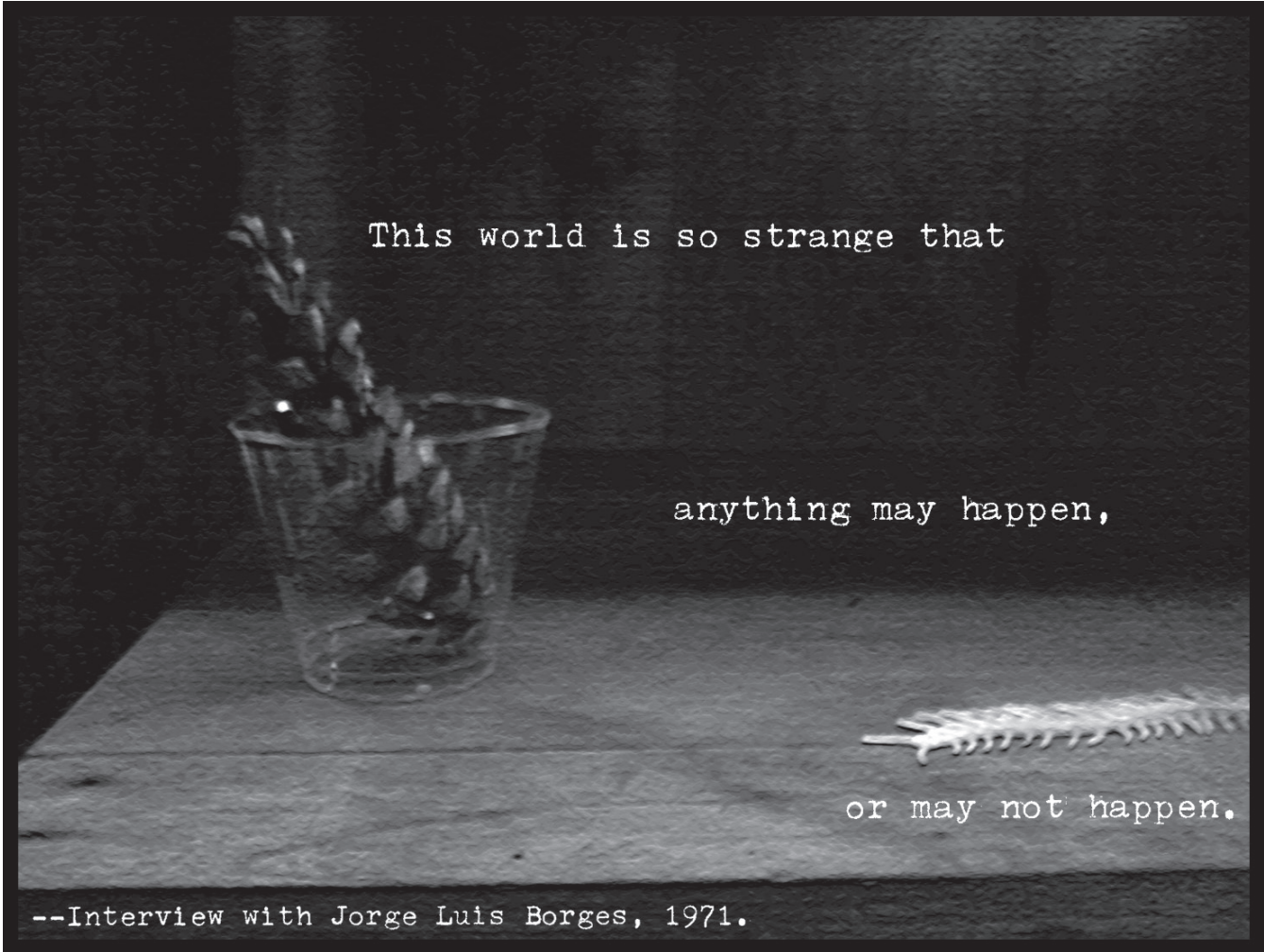
Kassandra Soulard lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. She is right now decorating our house for Halloween. She is the nicest decoration of all, by far.

Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. Finishing up this issue just before its Jellicle Guild debut, so damned happy to have another good one done.

Walt Whitman was born in Long Island, New York in 1819, & died in Camden, New Jersey in 1892. His great book is the master-work, *Leaves of Grass*. More of his wonderful poetry was reprinted as part of the 2000 Burning Man Books series, & can be found online at: <http://www.scriptorpress.com/nobordersbookstore.html>.

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This world is so strange that

anything may happen,

or may not happen.

--Interview with Jorge Luis Borges, 1971.

